AN

APOLOGY

FOR THE

BIBLE,

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

THOMAS PAINE,

AUTHOR OF A BOOK ENTITLED, THE AGE OF REASON, PART THE SECOND, BEING AN INVESTIGATION OF TRUE AND OF FABULOUS THEOLOGY.

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1796.

LETTER I.

SIR,

I HAVE lately met with a book of your's, entitled —THE AGE OF REASON, part the ſecond, being an inveſtigation of true and of fabulous theology;—and I think it not inconſiſtent with my ſtation, and the duty I owe to ſociety, to trouble you and the world with ſome obſervations on ſo extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I eſteem it; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced againſt revealed religion, (for I find little or no novelty in them,) but from the zeal with which you labour to diſſeminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you eſteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your ſincerity, how much ſoever I may queſtion your wiſdom, in writing in ſuch a manner on ſuch a ſubject: and I have no reluctance in acknowledging, that you poſſeſs a conſiderable ſhare of energy of language, and acuteneſs of inveſtigation; though I muſt be allowed to lament, that theſe talents have not been applied in a manner more uſeful to human kind, and more creditable to yourſelf.

I begin with your preface. You therein ſtate—that you long had an intention of publiſhing your

thoughts upon religion, bat that you had originally reſerved it to a later period in life.—I hope there is no want of charity in ſaying, that it would have been fortunate for the chriſtian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accompliſhing your purpoſe you will have unſettled the faith of thouſands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable aſſurance of a future recompence; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future puniſhment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every paſſion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public inſecurity, and of the private unhappineſs, uſually and almoſt neceſſarily accompanying a ſtate of corrupted morals.

No one can think worſe of confeſſion to a prieſt and ſubſequent abſolution, as practiſed in the church of Rome, than I do: but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine-maſſacres to that cauſe. Men's minds were not prepared, as you ſuppoſe, for the commiſſion of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome, corrupted as I eſteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not ſociety expect from thoſe, who ſhall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and thoſe about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed ſatisfaction, that you had written the former part of your Age of Reaſon—and you know therefore, you ſay, by experience, the conſcientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the ſincerity of your perſuaſion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conſcience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occaſions, what is right or wrong? Or is it merely

merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible ſenſe. Now who ſees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and diſpaſſionate uſe of our reaſon, in the inveſtigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profeſs; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the perſons with whom we aſſociate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental cauſes. Who ſees not that, on this account, conſcience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude even when it is certain, becauſe the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly perſuaded of an error in reaſoning, or of an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in oppoſition to his conſcience: but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conſcience, on all occaſions act right. An inquiſitor, who burns jews and heretics; a Robeſpierre, who maſſacres innocent and harmleſs women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a ſtate of property is an unjuſt infringement of natural liberty:—theſe, and a thouſand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conſcience; and may, at the real or ſuppoſed approach of death, remember "with renewed ſatisfaction" the worſt of their tranſactions, and experience, without diſmay, "a conſcientious trial of their principles. But this

their conſcientious compoſure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themſelves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of ſuggeſting to you a conſideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the beſt of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be eſtabliſhed?—You will allow, that thouſands of learned and impartial men, (I ſpeak not of prieſts, who, however, are, I truſt, as learned and impartial as yourſelf, but of laymen of the moſt ſplendid talents)—you will allow, that thouſands of theſe, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether theſe men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkneſs of ignorance, ſhackled by the chains of ſuperſtition, whilſt you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a queſtion I ſubmit to the deciſion of your readers.

If you have made the beſt examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an impoſture, I pray that God may pardon what I eſteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That goſpel, which you deſpiſe, has taught me this moderation; it has ſaid to me—"Who art thou that judgeſt another man's ſervant? To his own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth."—I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I preſume not to determine. I know indeed where it is ſaid—"that the preaching of the croſs is to them that periſh fooliſhneſs,—and that if the goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt." The conſequence of your unbelief muſt be left to the juſt and merciful judgment of him, who alone knoweth the mechaniſm and the

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liberty of our underſtandings; the origin of our opinions; the ſtrength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reaſoning faculties.

I ſhall, deſignedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may ſtand a chance of being peruſed by that claſs of readers, for whom your work ſeems to be particularly calculated, and who are moſt likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poiſon of infidelity: they will excuſe me, therefore, for having entered, as little as poſſible, into deep diſquiſitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The ſubject has been ſo learnedly, and ſo frequently, handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almoſt ſaid, it does not admit) any farther proof. And it is the more neceſſary to adopt this mode of anſwering your book, becauſe you diſclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itſelf, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to ſhew, from the Bible itſelf, the direct contrary. But in caſe any of your readers ſhould think that you had not put forth all your ſtrength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; leſt they ſhould ſuſpect that all ancient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, ſacred or profane, chriſtian, jewiſh, or pagan, inſtead of leſſening, they would have eſtabliſhed, the credit and authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itſelf; in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The firſt queſtion you propoſe for conſideration is—"Whether there is ſufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not?"—

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You determine this queſtion in the negative, upon what you are pleaſed to call moral evidence. You hold it impoſſible that the Bible can be the Word of God, becauſe it is therein ſaid, that the Iſraelites deſtroyed the Canaanites by the expreſs command of God: and to believe the Bible to be true, we muſt, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral juſtice of God; for wherein, you aſk, could crying or ſmiling infants offend?—I am aſtoniſhed that ſo acute a reaſoner ſhould attempt to diſparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profeſs yourſelf to be a deiſt, and to believe that there is a God, who created the univerſe, and eſtabliſhed the laws of nature, by which it is ſuſtained in exiſtence. You profeſs that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, becauſe it aſcribes to God things inconſiſtent (as you ſuppoſe) with the attributes which you have diſcovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral juſtice, that he ſhould doom to deſtruction the crying or ſmiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral juſtice, that he ſhould ſuffer crying or ſmiling infants to be ſwallowed by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, conſumed by a fire, ſtarved by a famine, or deſtroyed by a peſtilence? The Word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; crying or ſmiling infants are ſubject to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the expreſs command of God, opened her mouth, and ſwallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their ſons, and their little ones. This you eſteem ſo repugnant to God's moral juſtice, that you ſpurn, as ſpurious, the book in which the circumſtance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Liſbon, were ſeverally deſtroyed

deſtroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their ſons, and their little ones, were ſwallowed up alive:—why do you not ſpurn, as ſpurious, the book of nature, in which this fact is certainly written, and from the peruſal of which you infer the moral juſtice of God? You will, probably, reply, that the evils which the Canaanites ſuffered from the expreſs command of God, were different from thoſe which are brought on mankind, by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! in what?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the ſubjects of ſufferance—not in the author of it—for my philoſophy, at leaſt, inſtructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath through all ages executed, the laws of nature; and that he will through all eternity adminiſter them, for the general happineſs of his creatures, whether we can, on every occaſion, diſcern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of queſtioning the exiſtence of the moral juſtice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is ſhortly this—that you have no right, in fairneſs of reaſoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral juſtice, as an argument againſt revealed religion, becauſe you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument againſt natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter, without adverting that, as to your objection, they muſt ſtand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needleſs to enter into any proof of the depraved ſtate of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to deſtruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moſes, they were idolaters, ſacrificers of their own crying or ſmiling infants; devourers of human fleſh; addicted to unnatural luſt; immerſed in the filthineſs of all manner of vice. Now, I think,

think, it will be impoſſible to prove, that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral juſtice, to exterminate ſo wicked a people. He made the Iſraelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave ſuch an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to ſtrike the ſurrounding nations with aſtoniſhment and terror, and to impreſs on the minds of the Iſraelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye ſhall not commit any of theſe abominations—that the land ſpue not you out alſo, as it ſpued out the nations that were before you." How ſtrong and deſcriptive this language! the vices of the inhabitants were ſo abominable, that the very land was ſick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the ſtomach diſgorges a deadly poiſon.

I have often wondered what could be the reaſon that men, not deſtitute of talents, ſhould be deſirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and ſtudious in expoſing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the ſcriptures, to popular animadverſion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this ſtrange propenſity to what Plato attributed the atheiſm of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of ſingularity—to groſs ignorance, aſſuming the ſemblance of deep reſearch and ſuperior ſagacity;—I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment, reſpecting the manners, and mental acquirements, of human kind in the firſt ages of the world. Moſt unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our ſpecies, had the ſame diſtinct conceptions of one, eternal, inviſible, incorporeal, infinitely wiſe, powerful, and good God, which they themſelves have now. This I look upon as a great miſtake,

miſtake, and a pregnant ſource of infidelity. Human kind, by long experience; by the inſtitutions of civil ſociety; by the cultivation of arts and ſciences; by, as I believe, divine inſtruction actually given to ſome, and traditionally communicated to all; is in a far more diſtinguiſhed ſituation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The hiſtory of man is the hiſtory of the providence of God; who, willing the ſupreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of thoſe, who in different ages were the ſubjects of it. The hiſtory of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the ſame age, are but ſeparate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immenſe deſign? The ſhortneſs of life, the weakneſs of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conſpire to make it impoſſible for us, worms of the earth! inſects of an hour! completely to underſtand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the ſubject, ought to be ſurpriſed, that in the hiſtories of ancient times many things ſhould occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and neceſſity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty ſhould have had colloquial intercourſe with our firſt parents; that he ſhould have contracted a kind of friendſhip for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he ſhould have ſuſpended the laws of nature in Egypt; ſhould have been ſo apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and ſhould have ſo far demeaned himſelf, as to give to that people a burdenſome ritual of worſhip, ſtatutes and ordinances, many of which ſeem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic.

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I have converſed with many deiſts, and have always found that the ſtrangeneſs of theſe things was the only reaſon for their diſbelief of them: nothing ſimilar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore admit, that theſe events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a ſtate of manhood, contend that he had never either ſtood in need of or experienced the foſtering care of a mother's kindneſs, the weariſome attention of his nurſe, or the inſtruction and diſcipline of his ſchoolmaſter. The Supreme Being ſelected one family from an idolatrous world; nurſed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holineſs, juſtice, mercy, power, and wiſdom; diſſeminated them, at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might aſſure all other nations of the exiſtence of one ſupreme God, the creator and preſerver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With what reaſon can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, ſhould be done to all? that the mode of inſtruction, which was ſuited to the infancy of the world, ſhould be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecillity of its old age? I own to you, that when I conſider how nearly man, in a ſavage ſtate, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence; and when I contemplate his miſerable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized ſtate, when he has had no divine inſtruction on the ſubject, or when that inſtruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known ſomething of God from tradition,) I cannot but admire the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Supreme Being, in having let himſelf down to our apprehenſions; in having given to mankind, in the

the earlieſt ages, ſenſible and extraordinary proofs of his exiſtence and attributes; in having made the jewiſh and chriſtian diſpenſations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himſelf, which he had vouchſafed to give immediately to the firſt. I own it is ſtrange, very ſtrange, that he ſhould have made an immediate manifeſtation of himſelf in the firſt ages of the world; but what is there that is not ſtrange? It is ſtrange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a ſun, and moon, and ſtars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of theſe things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I alſo am his workmanſhip, and look up to him with hope of preſervation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word hath aſſured me of all that I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlaſting happineſs for thoſe who love and obey him. This you will call preachment,—I will have done with it; but the ſubject is ſo vaſt, and the plan of providence, in my opinion, ſo obviouſly wiſe and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleaſed to think it) againſt the Bible, you threaten, in the progreſs of your work, to produce ſuch other evidence as even a prieſt cannot deny. A philoſopher in ſearch of truth forfeits with me all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reaſoning, vulgar and illiberal ſarcaſm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you ſet me; but examine what you ſhall produce, with as much coolneſs and reſpect, as if you had given the prieſts no provocation; as if you were a man

man of the moſt unblemiſhed character, ſubject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad deſigns, not liable to have abuſe retorted upon you with ſucceſs.

LETTER II.

BEFORE you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wiſh to eſtabliſh a difference between the evidence neceſſary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not ſurpriſed at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the ſubject have agreed in thinking that St. Auſtin reaſoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineneſs of the Bible, he aſked —"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Ariſtotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by thoſe whoſe names they bear; unleſs it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all thoſe who have lived ſince theſe authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which eſtabliſhed the genuineneſs of any profane book, would eſtabliſh that of a ſacred book; and I profeſs myſelf to be of the ſame opinion, notwithſtanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas ſeem to me to be confuſed; I do not ſay that you, deſignedly, jumble together mathematical ſcience and hiſtorical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonſtration, and the probability derived from teſtimony.—You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges univerſal

univerſal conſent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements.—If I were diſpoſed to make frivolous objections, I ſhould ſay that even Euclid's Elements had not met with univerſal conſent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had queſtioned the intuitive evidence of ſome of his axioms, and denied the juſtneſs of ſome of his demonſtrations: but, admitting the truth, I do not ſee the pertinency of your obſervation. You are attempting to ſubvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true.—What then?—Does it follow that the Bible is certainly falſe? The moſt illiterate ſcrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reaſoning from that by which he perſuades himſelf to believe, that there was ſuch a perſon as Henry VIII. or that there is ſuch a city as Paris.

It may be of uſe, to remove this confuſion in your argument, to ſtate, diſtinctly, the difference between the genuineneſs, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the perſon whoſe name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine, without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardſon and Fielding are genuine books, though the hiſtories of Clariſſa and Tom Jones are fables. The hiſtory of the iſland of Formoſa is a genuine book; it was written by Pſalmanazar; but it is not an authentic book, (though it was long eſteemed as ſuch, and tranſlated into different languages,) for the author, in the latter part of his life, took ſhame to himſelf for having impoſed on the world, and confeſſed that it was a mere romance. Anſon's Voyage may be conſidered

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as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walters, to whom it is aſcribed, but by Robins.

This diſtinction between the genuineneſs and authenticity of a book, will aſſiſt us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you ſtate with great confidence in the part of your work now under conſideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as concluſive evidence againſt the truth of the Bible. Your argument ſtands thus—if it be found that the books aſcribed to Moſes, Joſhua, and Samuel, were not written by Moſes, Joſhua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of theſe books is gone at once.—I preſume to think otherwiſe. The genuineneſs of theſe books (in the judgment of thoſe who ſay that they were written by theſe authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may ſtill contain a true account of real tranſactions, though the names of the writers of them ſhould be found to be different from what they are generally eſteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moſes ſaid that he wrote the five firſt books of the Bible; and had Joſhua and Samuel ſaid that they wrote the books which are reſpectively attributed to them; and had it been found, that Moſes, Joſhua, and Samuel, did not write theſe books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once; theſe men would have been found liars, as to the genuineneſs of the books; and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their teſtimony in every other; theſe books would have been juſtly ſtigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

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An hiſtory may be true, though it ſhould not only be aſcribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it ſhould not be known; anonymous teſtimony does not deſtroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon publiſhed his Hiſtory of the Rebellion, without prefixing his name to it; or had the hiſtory of Titus Livius come down to us, under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in theſe hiſtories would have been equally certain.

As to your aſſertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane hiſtorians, are quite as well authenticated as thoſe of the Bible—it, being a mere aſſertion deſtitute of proof, may be properly anſwered by a contrary aſſertion. I take the liberty then to ſay, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, ſo greatly ſuperior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to juſtify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in with-holding it from the other as the effect of ſuperſtition and impoſture. This method of derogating from the credibility of chriſtianity, by oppoſing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impoſtors, ſeems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jeſus wrought miracles; but leſt that admiſſion ſhould have compelled them to abandon their gods and become chriſtians, they ſaid, that their *Apollonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Ariſteas*, did as great: whilſt modern deiſts deny the fact of Jeſus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have ſome reaſon for this proceeding; they are ſenſible that the goſpel miracles are ſo different, in all their circumſtances, from

from thoſe related in pagan ſtory, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they muſt admit chriſtianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deiſtical axiom—that no human teſtimony can eſtabliſh the credibility of a miracle.—This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is ſtill inſiſted upon, as if its truth had never been queſtioned, and could not be diſproved.

You "proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you ſay, with what are called the five books of Moſes, Geneſis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profeſs, is to ſhew that theſe books are ſpurious, and that Moſes is not the author of them; and ſtill farther, that they were not written in the time of Moſes, nor till ſeveral hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted hiſtory of the life of Moſes, and of the times in which he is ſaid to have lived, and alſo of the times prior thereto, written by ſome very ignorant and ſtupid pretender to authorſhip, ſeveral hundred years after the death of Moſes."—In this paſſage the utmoſt force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moſes is clearly ſtated. You are not the firſt who has ſtarted this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in the ſynagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Aben Ezra*, a jew of great erudition, noticed ſome paſſages (the ſame that you have brought forward) in the five firſt books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moſes, but inſerted by ſome perſon after the death of Moſes. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that theſe books were written by ſome ignorant and ſtupid pretender to authorſhip, many hundred years after the death of Moſes. *Hobbes* contends that the books of Moſes are ſo called, not from their having been written by Moſes, but

but from their containing an account of Moſes. *Spinoza* ſupported the ſame opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the laſt and preſent century, once entertained the ſame notion. You ſee that this fancy has had ſome patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the ſagacity or the temerity of having aſſerted, that Moſes is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not excluſively your's. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you muſt not boaſt of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was aſhamed of what he had written on the ſubject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Geneſis, a Latin diſſertation—concerning Moſes, the author of the Pentateuch, and his deſign in compoſing it. If in your future life you ſhould chance to change your opinion on the ſubject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as ſpurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the hiſtory of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Conſtantine*; and that the Claſſics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Theſe extravagant reveries amuſed the world at the time of their publication, and have long ſince ſunk into oblivion. You eſteem all prophets to be ſuch lying raſcals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineneſs of the books of Moſes, you aſſert—"that there is no affirmative evidence that Moſes is the author of them."—What! no affirmative evidence! In the eleventh century *Maimonides* drew up a confeſſion of faith for the jews, which all of them at this day admit; it conſiſts of only thirteen articles; and two of them have reſpect to Moſes;

one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineneſs of his books.—The doctrine and prophecy of Moſes is true—The law that we have was given by Moſes—This is the faith of the jews at preſent, and has been their faith ever ſince the deſtruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Teſtament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be ſhewn, from the age of Moſes to the preſent hour, in which it was not their faith.—Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot deſire a ſtronger. *Joſephus*, in his book againſt *Appion*, writes thus—" We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the hiſtory of all ages; five belong to Moſes, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the ſucceſſion of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compaſs of about three thouſand years." Do you conſider this as no affirmative evidence? Why ſhould I mention *Juvenal* ſpeaking of the volume which Moſes had written? Why enumerate a long liſt of profane authors, all bearing teſtimony to the fact of *Moſes* being the leader and the law-giver of the jewiſh nation? and if a law-giver, ſurely, a writer of the laws. But what ſays the Bible? In Exodus it ſays—" Moſes wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people."—In Deuteronomy it ſays—" And it came to paſs, when Moſes had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finiſhed, (this ſurely imports the finiſhing a laborious work,) that Moſes commanded the Levites which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, ſaying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the ſide of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witneſs againſt thee." This is ſaid in Deuteronomy,

Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the jews gave the name of the Law to the firſt five books of the Old Teſtament. What poſſible doubt can there be that Moſes wrote the books in queſtion? I could accumulate many other paſſages from the ſcriptures to this purpoſe; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the ſtrongeſt kind, for Moſes's being the author of theſe books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I ſhould grant all you undertake to prove (the ſtupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted)?—What if I ſhould admit, that *Samuel*, or *Ezra*, or ſome other learned jew, compoſed theſe books, from public records, many years after the death of Moſes? Will it follow that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow, that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomſoever they were written. It cannot be ſaid that the jews had no public records; the Bible furniſhes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that theſe books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moſes; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true hiſtory, though we know not the author of it; or though we may be miſtaken in aſcribing it to a wrong author.

The firſt argument you produce againſt Moſes being the author of theſe books is ſo old, that I do not know its original author; and it is ſo miſerable an one, that I wonder you ſhould adopt it—"Theſe books cannot be written by Moſes, becauſe they are wrote in the third perſon—it is always, the Lord ſaid unto Moſes, or Moſes ſaid unto the Lord. This, you ſay, is the ſtyle and manner that hiſtorians uſe in ſpeaking of the perſons whoſe lives and actions they are writing." This obſervation is true, but it

does not extend far enough ; for this is the ſtyle and manner not only of hiſtorians writing of other perſons, but of eminent men, ſuch as *Xenophon* and *Joſephus*, writing of themſelves. If General *Waſhington* ſhould write the hiſtory of the American war, and ſhould, from his great modeſty, ſpeak of himſelf in the third perſon, would you think it reaſonable that, two or three thouſand years hence, any perſon ſhould on that account, contend, that the hiſtory was not true? *Cæſar* writes of himſelf in the third perſon—it is always, Cæſar made a ſpeech, or a ſpeech was made to Cæſar, Cæſar croſſed the Rhine, Cæſar invaded Britain ; but every ſchool-boy knows, that this circumſtance cannot be adduced as a ſerious argument againſt Cæſar's being the author of his own commentaries.

But Moſes, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers,—becauſe he ſays of himſelf—"that Moſes was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he ſaid this of himſelf, he was, you ſay, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb, (ſuch is your phraſe !) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not ſay it, the *books* are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmleſs ; it has not an horn to hurt the weakeſt logician. If Moſes did not write this little verſe, if it was inſerted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is uſually reputed the author ? And if he did write this of himſelf, he was juſtified by the occaſion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expreſſion been written in a modern ſtyle and manner, it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be ſo faſtidious as to find fault with an illuſtrious

illuſtrious man, who, being calumniated by his neareſt relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, ſhould vindicate his character by ſaying, My temper was naturally as meek and unaſſuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occaſions, in which a modeſt man, who ſpeaks truly, may ſpeak proudly of himſelf, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occaſion, which either more requires, or more excuſes this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aſperſions of thoſe who both knew his character and had experienced his kindneſe: and in that predicament ſtood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accuſers of Moſes. You yourſelf have, probably, felt the ſting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impreſſion. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boaſt, and I hope truly, "that the man does not exiſt that can ſay I have perſecuted him, or any man, or any ſet of men, in the American revolution, or in the French revolution; or that I have in any caſe returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and prieſts may ſay to this; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, becauſe they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needleſs to notice your obſervation upon what you call the dramatic ſtyle of Deuteronomy; it is an ill-founded hypotheſis. You might as well aſk, where the author of Cæſar's commentaries got the ſpeeches of Cæſar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the ſpeeches of Moſes. But your argument—that Moſes was not the author of Deuteronomy, becauſe the reaſon given in that book for the obſervation of the ſabbath is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the ſame meaning. In the fifth verſe of the firſt chapter it is ſaid in our Bibles, "Moſes began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words, more properly tranſlated, import that Moſes "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no ſhift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are ſo rendered in moſt of the ancient verſions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently ſkilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wiſe and benevolent proceeding in Moſes; that thoſe who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was firſt (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it; eſpecially as Moſes their leader was ſoon to be taken from them, and they were about to be ſettled in the midſt of nations given to idolatry and ſunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that ſome variations, and ſome additions, ſhould be made to a law, when a legiſlator thinks fit to republiſh it many years after its firſt promulgation?

With reſpect to the ſabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin; ſome contending, that it was ſanctified from the creation of the world; that it was obſerved by the patriarchs before the flood; that it was neglected by the Iſraelites during their bondage in Egypt; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderneſs; and enjoined, as a poſitive law, at mount Sinai. Others eſteem its inſtitution to have been no older than the age of Moſes; and argue, that what is ſaid of the ſanctification of the ſabbath in the book of Geneſis, is ſaid by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both theſe accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his poſterity; and that the ſeventh day

was,

was, for a long time, held ſacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigidneſs of its obſervance was enjoined by Moſes to the Iſraelites alone. As to there being two reaſons given for its being kept holy,—one, that on that day God reſted from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them reſt from the ſervitude of Egypt—I ſee no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the hiſtory of England, ſhould inform his readers, that the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, becauſe on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody-intended maſſacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his hiſtory, he ſhould aſſign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reaſon for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not juſtified in both theſe ways of expreſſion, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both?

You think—"that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them ſtoned to death for what it is pleaſed to call ſtubbornneſs."—You are aware, I ſuppoſe, that paternal power, among the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Perſians*, and other nations, was of the moſt arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Iſraelites in the time of Moſes exerciſed this paternal power; it was not a cuſtom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of ſociety, before individual families had coaleſced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moſes, by this law, which you eſteem brutal and inhuman, hindered ſuch an extravagant power from being either introduced or exerciſed amongſt the Iſraelites.

Iſraelites. This law is ſo far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accuſing the child before a magiſtrate—the father and the mother of the child muſt agree in bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accuſation was true; and the accuſation was to be not merely, as you inſinuate, that the child was ſtubborn, but that he was "ſtubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard" Conſidered in this light, you muſt allow the law to have been an humane reſtriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuſe the prieſts, you abandon your ſubject—"Prieſts, you ſay, preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tythes."—I do not know that prieſts preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of ſcripture; but I do know that tythes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the hiſtory, and the prophets of the jewiſh nation.—You go on —"It is from this book, chap. xxv. ver. 4, they have taken the phraſe, and applied it to tything, "Thou ſhalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn;" and that this might not eſcape obſervation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a ſingle verſe of leſs than two lines. O prieſts! prieſts! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the ſake of tythes!" —I cannot call this—reaſoning —and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, inſtead of ſimply ſaying—the ox is not to be muzzled—ſaid—tythes enjoined, or prieſts to be maintained—there would have been a little ground for your cenſure.

ſure. Whoever noted this phraſe at the head of the chapter, had better reaſon for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it, becauſe St. Paul had quoted it, when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the goſpel had a right to live by the goſpel; it was Paul, and not the prieſts, who firſt applied this phraſe to tything. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himſelf of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, intereſted in what he ſaid. The reaſon, on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moſes, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jeſus, which you deſpiſe; no, it is a reaſon founded in the nature of things, and which no philoſopher, no unbeliever, no man of common ſenſe can deny to be a ſolid reaſon; it amounts to this—that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Nothing is ſo much a man's own, as his labour and ingenuity; and it is intirely conſonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent uſe of theſe he ſhould provide for his ſubſiſtence. Huſbandmen, artiſts, ſoldiers, phyſicians, lawyers, all let out their labour and talent for a ſtipulated reward: why may not a prieſt do the ſame? Some accounts of you have been publiſhed in England; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a deſign to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition in life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the neceſſity of acquiring the means of ſuſtaining life by the labour either of hand or head: if this be the caſe, you ought not to deſpiſe thoſe who have come into the world in leſs favourable circumſtances. If your origin has been leſs fortunate, you muſt have ſupported yourſelf, either by manual labour, or the exerciſe of your genius. Why ſhould you think that conduct diſreputable in prieſts, which you

you probably conſider as laudable in yourſelf? I know not whether you have not as great a diſlike of kings as of prieſts: but that you may be induced to think more favourably of men of my profeſſion, I will juſt mention to you that the payment of tythes is no new inſtitution, but that they were paid in the moſt ancient times, not to prieſts only, but to kings. I could give you an hundred inſtances of this: two may be ſufficient. *Abraham* paid tythes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moſes was given. The king of Salem was prieſt alſo of the moſt high God. Prieſts, you ſee, exiſted in the world, and were held in high eſtimation, for kings were prieſts, long before the impoſtures, as you eſteem them, of the jewiſh and chriſtian diſpenſations were heard of. But as this inſtance is taken from a book which you call "a book of contradictions and lies"—the Bible;—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written bya profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Piſiſtratus* to that lawgiver, in which he ſays—"I Piſiſtratus, the tyrant, am contented with the ſtipends which were paid to thoſe who reigned before me; the people of Athens ſet apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land, not for my private uſe, but to be expended in the public ſacrifices, and for the general good."

LETTER

LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moſes was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your hiſtorical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Geneſis. Your firſt argument is taken from the ſingle word —Dan—being found in Geneſis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laiſh was not called Dan, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moſes; therefore the writer of Geneſis, you conclude, muſt have lived after the town of Laiſh had the name of Dan given to it. Leſt this objection ſhould not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illuſtrate it in the following manner: "Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; ſhould then any dateleſs writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that ſuch a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793." This is a wrong concluſion. Suppoſe ſome hot republican ſhould at this day publiſh a new edition of any old hiſtory of France, and inſtead of Havre-de-Grace ſhould write Havre-Marat; and that two or three thouſand years hence, a man, like yourſelf, ſhould, on that account, reject the whole hiſtory as ſpurious, would he be juſtified in ſo doing? Would it not be reaſonable to tell him—that the name Havre-Marat had been inſerted, not by the original author of the hiſtory, but by a ſubſequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineneſs of the book, to the

the teſtimony of the whole French nation? This ſuppoſition ſo obviouſly applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this ſolution does not pleaſe you, I deſire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Geneſis, was the ſame town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges. I deſire, further, to have it proved, that the Dan, mentioned in Geneſis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely ſaid—Abram purſued them, the enemies of Lot, to Dan. Now a river was full as likely as a town to ſtop a purſuit. *Lot*, we know, was ſettled in the plain of *Jordan*; and Jordan, we know, was compoſed of the united ſtreams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty reſpects its being ſaid in Geneſis—"These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Iſrael:—this paſſage could only have been written, you ſay (and I think you ſay rightly,) after the firſt king began to reign over Iſrael; ſo far from being written by Moſes, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the leaſt." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A ſmall addition to a book does not deſtroy either the genuineneſs or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which the commentators have anſwered this objection of Spinoza, without making the conceſſion which I have made; but I have no ſcruple in admitting, that the paſſage in queſtion, conſiſting of nine verſes containing the genealogy of ſome kings of Edom, might have been inſerted in the book of Geneſis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have ſhewn, that interpolations have happened to other books; but

theſe inſertions by other hands have never been conſidered as invalidating the authority of thoſe books.

" Take away from Geneſis," you ſay, " the belief that Moſes was the author, on which only the ſtrange belief that it is the Word of God has ſtood, and there remains nothing of Geneſis but an anonymous book of ſtories, fables, traditionary or invented abſurdities, or of downright lies."—What! is it a ſtory then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God? If you deem this a ſtory, I am not diſputing with a deiſtical philoſopher, but with an atheiſtic madman. Is it a ſtory, that our firſt parents fell from a paradiſiacal ſtate —that this earth was deſtroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preſerved in the ark, and that the world has been repeopled by his deſcendants?—Look into a book ſo common that almoſt every body has it, and ſo excellent that no perſon ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the chriſtian religion—and you will there meet with abundant teſtimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Geneſis The teſtimony is not that of jews, chriſtians, and prieſts; it is the teſtimony of the philoſophers, hiſtorians, and poets of antiquity. The oldeſt book in the world is Geneſis; and it is remarkable that thoſe books which come neareſt to it in age, are thoſe which make, either the moſt diſtinct mention, or the moſt evident alluſion to the facts related in Geneſis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic maſs, the primeval innocence and ſubſequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the firſt ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the deſtruction of the world.—Read the tenth chapter of Geneſis.—It may appear to you to contain nothing but an unintereſting narration of the deſcendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented abſurdity, a downright lie. No,

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ſir, it is one of the moſt valuable, and the moſt venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane hiſtorians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had ſprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a graſshopper; another from an oak; another from a muſhroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed it would have merited the appellation you, with ſo much temerity, beſtow upon it. Inſtead of theſe abſurdities, it gives ſuch an account of the peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which all other books in the world, which contain any thing on the ſubject, confirm. The laſt verſe of the chapter ſays —" Theſe are the families of the ſons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by theſe were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, preciſely, either the actual ſituation of all the countries in which theſe founders of empires ſettled, or to aſcertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the ſatisfaction of all competent judges; ſo much at leaſt to my ſatisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Geneſis, I ſhould conſider this as ſufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of ſuch people as the *Aſſyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Aſſur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madai*, and *Javan*, and *Tiras*, grandſons of *Noah*, for their reſpective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a ſyſtem of fables. I am no enemy to philoſophy; but when philoſophy would rob me of my Bible, I muſt ſay of it, as Cicero ſaid of the twelve tables,—This little book alone exceeds the

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libraries of all the philoſophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuſe of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moſes, and again bring forward the ſubject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war, (would to God that all men ſaw it in the ſame light!) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not neceſſary, ſhocking to humanity, and repugnant to reaſon. But is it repugnant to reaſon that God ſhould, by an expreſs act of his providence, deſtroy a wicked nation? I am fond of conſidering the goodneſs of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of conſidering his juſtice as ſubſervient to his mercy. He puniſhes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am perſuaded that all his puniſhments originate in his abhorrence of ſin; are calculated to leſſen its influence; and are proofs of his goodneſs; inaſmuch as it may not be poſſible for Omnipotence itſelf to communicate ſupreme happineſs to the human race, whilſt they continue ſervants of ſin. The deſtruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a ſignal proof of God's diſpleaſure againſt ſin; it has been to others, and it is to ourſelves, a benevolent warning. Moſes would have been the wretch you repreſent him, had he acted by his own authority alone: but you may as reaſonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and maſſacre to Moſes in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counſel of Balaam, and by the vicious inſtrumentality of their women, had ſeduced a part of the Iſraelites to idolatry; to the impure worſhip of their infamous god Baalpeor: —for this offence, twenty four thouſand Iſraelites had periſhed in a plague from heaven, and Moſes received a command from God "to ſmite the Midianites

nites who had beguiled the people. An army was equipped, and ſent againſt Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moſes and the princes of the congregation went to meet it; "and Moſes was wroth with the officers." He obſerved the women captives, and he aſked with aſtoniſhment, "Have ye ſaved all the women alive? Behold, theſe cauſed the children of Iſrael, through the counſel of Balaam, to commit treſpaſs againſt the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation." He then gave an order that the boys and the women ſhould be put to death, but that the young maidens ſhould be kept alive for themſelves. I ſee nothing in this proceeding, but good policy, combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of, what they would eſteem, their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Iſraelites to the love of licentious pleaſures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create diſturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you ſay—"that thirty-two thouſand women-children were conſigned to debauchery by the order of Moſes."—Prove this, and I will allow that Moſes was the horrid monſter you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it—a book of lies, wickedneſs, and blaſphemy"—prove this, or excuſe my warmth if I ſay to you, as Paul ſaid to Elymas the ſorcerer, who ſought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "O full of all ſubtilty, and all miſchief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteouſneſs, wilt thou not ceaſe to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"—I did not, when I began theſe letters, think that I ſhould have been moved to this ſeverity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written;

written; but when ſo groſs a miſrepreſentation is made of God's proceedings, coolneſs would be a crime. The women-children were not reſerved for the purpoſes of debauchery, but of ſlavery;—a cuſtom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practiſed in former times, and ſtill practiſed in countries where the benignity of the chriſtian religion has not ſoftened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible reſpecting the expedition againſt Midian to be a true account: it is not unreaſonable to deſire that you will admit the whole, or ſhew ſufficient reaſon why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Iſraelitiſh army conſiſted but of twelve thouſand men, a mere handful when oppoſed to the people of Midian; yet, when the officers made a muſter of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not loſt a ſingle man! This circumſtance ſtruck them as ſo deciſive an evidence of God's interpoſition, that out of the ſpoils they had taken they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their ſouls." Do but believe what the captains of thouſands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when theſe things happened, and we ſhall never more hear of your objections to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moſes.

You produce two or three other objections reſpecting the genuineneſs of the firſt five books of the Bible.—I cannot ſtop to notice them: every commentator anſwers them in a manner ſuited to the apprehenſion of even a mere Engliſh reader. You calculate, to the thouſandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og* the king of Baſan; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been loſt in it. You make no allowance for the ſize of a royal

bed; nor ever ſuſpect that king Og might have been poſſeſſed with the ſame kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his ſoldiers to enlarge the ſize of their beds, that they might give to the Indians, in ſucceeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious ſtature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you ſpeak much in commendation of ſcience. I join with you in every commendation you can give it: but you ſpeak of it in ſuch a manner as gives room to believe, that you are a proficient in it; if this be the caſe, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the ſolution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man converſant only, as you repreſent prieſts and biſhops to be, in *hic*, *hæc*, *hoc*. The problem is this—To determine the height to which a human body, preſerving its ſimilarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will periſh by its own weight.—When you have ſolved this problem, we ſhall know whether the bed of the king of Baſan was too big for any giant; whether the exiſtence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impoſſible. My philoſophy teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject every teſtimony which is oppoſite to my experience: had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper teſtimony, have believed in the exiſtence of the Lincolnſhire ox, or of the largeſt dray-horſe in London; though the oxen and horſes in Shetland had not been bigger than maſtiffs.

LETTER IV.

HAVING finiſhed your objections to the genuineneſs of the books of Moſes, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joſhua; and from its internal evidence you endeavour to prove, that this book was not written by Joſhua.—What then? what is your concluſion?—" that it is anonymous and without authority."—Stop a little; your concluſion is not connected with your premiſes; your friend Euclid would have been aſhamed of it. " Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this ſoleciſm before; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book ſtands much in need of it, I will ſubmit to your conſideration another obſervation on the ſubject—The book called Fleta is anonymous; but it is not on that account without authority.—Domeſday book is anonymous, and was written above ſeven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you will ſay, but this book has been preſerved with ſingular care amongſt the records of the nation. And who told you that the jews had no records, or that they did not preſerve them with ſingular care? Joſephus ſays the contrary: and, in the Bible itſelf an appeal is made to many books, which have periſhed; ſuch as the book of Jaſher, the book of Natham, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural

hiſtory by Solomon, of the acts of Manaſſeh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one, having acceſs to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treaſury, war-office, privy council, and other public documents, ſhould at this day write an hiſtory of the reigns of George the firſt and ſecond, and ſhould publiſh it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thouſands of years hence, queſtion the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole Britiſh nation had received it as an authentic book, from the time of its firſt publication to the age in which he lived? This ſuppoſition is in point. The books of the Old Teſtament were compoſed from the records of the jewiſh nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the preſent day. Dodſley's Annual Regiſter is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Regiſter is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our poſterity, eſteem theſe books as of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at preſent, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary hiſtory of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being ſtartled by your aſſertion, "It is anonymous and without authority."

If I am right in this reaſoning, (and I proteſt to you that I do not ſee any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joſhua was not written by Joſhua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpoſe for which you have brought them forward: theſe books may be books of authority, though all you advance againſt the genuineneſs of them ſhould be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no ſuch poſitive proof, when or by whom theſe, and ſome other books of holy ſcripture, were written, as

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to exclude all poſſibility of doubt and cavil. There is no neceſſity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and hiſtorical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been anſwered, and as to the greateſt part of them, ſo well anſwered, that I will not waſte the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourſelf merry with what you call the tale of the ſun ſtanding upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you ſay that "the ſtory detects itſelf, becauſe there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there ſhould, when there is not a nation in the world whoſe annals reach this æra by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably miſtaken as to the fact: a confuſed tradition concerning this miracle, and a ſimilar one in the time of Ahaz, when the ſun went back ten degrees, has been preſerved amongſt one of the moſt ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the moſt ancient hiſtorians. Herodotus, in his Euterpe, ſpeaking of the Egyptian prieſts, ſays—"They told me that the ſun had four times deviated from his courſe, having twice riſen where he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly riſes. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth and the phenomena of the Nile had always been the ſame." (Beloe's Tranſl.) The laſt part of this obſervation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian prieſts had a reference to the two miracles reſpecting the ſun mentioned in ſcripture; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or ſeaſons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery;—you may have ſeen ſome jewiſh doctors, and ſome chriſtian commentators, who conſider it as ſuch; but improperly,

in my opinion. I think it idle, at leaſt, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he hence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the ſun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are ſtill retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithſtanding, that the ſun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are ſtill retained in their orbits. The machine of the univerſe is in the hand of God; he can ſtop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with leſs trouble and leſs danger of injuring it, than you can ſtop your watch. In teſtimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book ſays—"Is not this written in the book of Jaſher?"—No author in his ſenſes would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exiſt, or in atteſtation of a fact which, though it did exiſt, was not recorded in it; we may ſafely therefore conclude, that, at the time the book of Joſhua was written, there was ſuch a book as the book of Jaſher, and that the miracle of the ſun's ſtanding ſtill was recorded in that book. But this obſervation, you will ſay, does not prove the fact of the ſun's having ſtood ſtill; I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joſhua believed the fact, and that the people of Iſrael admitted the authority of the book of Jaſher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as ſenſeleſs an inſult upon their underſtanding, as it would have been upon our's, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Haſtings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument againſt the genuineneſs of the book of Joſhua, from its being ſaid that—"Joſhua burned Ai, and made it

it an heap for ever, even a deſolation unto *this day.*" Joſhua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai: and if he wrote his hiſtory in the latter part of his life, what abſurdity is there in ſaying, Ai is ſtill in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man, who had ſeen the heads of the rebels, in forty-five, when they were firſt ſtuck upon poles at Temple-bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in atteſtation of the fact, have juſtly ſaid—And they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the goſpel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almoſt ſaid certainly) not a quarter of one century after the death of Jeſus; yet the author, ſpeaking of the potter's field which had been purchaſed by the chief prieſts with the money they had given Judas to betray his maſter, ſays, that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day*; and in another place he ſays, that the ſtory of the body of Jeſus being ſtolen out of the ſepulchre was commonly reported among the jews *until this day.* Moſes, in his old age, had made uſe of a ſimilar expreſſion, when he put the Iſraelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the red ſea, "The Lord hath deſtroyed them unto this day. (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the laſt chapter of the book of Joſhua it is related, that Joſhua aſſembled all the tribes of Iſrael to Shechem; and there, in the preſence of the elders and principal men of Iſrael, he recapitulated, in a ſhort ſpeech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were ſettled in the land which God had promiſed to their forefathers. In finiſhing his ſpeech, he ſaid to them—"Chooſe you this day whom you will ſerve, whether the gods which your fathers ſerved, that were on the other ſide of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whoſe land ye dwell: but as for me and my houſe, we will ſerve the Lord. And the people

people anſwered and ſaid, God forbid that we ſhould forſake the Lord, to ſerve other gods." Joſhua urged farther, that God would not ſuffer them to worſhip other gods in fellowſhip with him; they anſwered, that "they would ſerve the Lord." Joſhua then ſaid to them, "Ye are witneſſes againſt yourſelves that ye have choſen you the Lord to ſerve him. And they ſaid, We are witneſſes." Here was a ſolemn covenant between Joſhua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Iſrael, on their own part.—The text then ſays—"So Joſhua made a covenant with the people that day, and ſet them a ſtatute and an ordinance in Shechem, *and Joſhua wrote theſe words in the book of the Law of God.*" Here is a proof of two things—firſt, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moſes, exiſting a book called the Book of the Law of God; the ſame, without doubt, which Moſes had written, and committed to the cuſtody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witneſs againſt them—ſecondly, that Joſhua *wrote* a part at leaſt of his own tranſactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own tranſactions in any book: but I ſubmit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material tranſaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material tranſactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joſhua; and that ſuch things as happened after his death, have been inſerted in it by others, in order to render the hiſtory more complete.

The book of Joſhua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the firſt book of Kings, chap. xvi. ver. 34. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firſt-born, and ſet up the gates thereof in his youngeſt ſon

ſon Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he ſpake by Joſhua the ſon of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joſhua is older than the firſt book of Kings: but that is not all which may reaſonably be inferred, I do not ſay proved, from this quotation.—It may be inferred from the phraſe —according to the word of the Lord which he ſpake by Joſhua the ſon of Nun—that Joſhua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had ſpoken. In Baruch (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpoſe) there is a ſimilar phraſe—as thou ſpakeſt by thy ſervant Moſes in the day when thou didſt command him *to write thy law*.

I think it unneceſſary to make any obſervation on what you ſay relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot paſs unnoticed your cenſure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling ſtory, fooliſhly told, no body knows by whom, about a ſtrolling country girl creeping ſlily to bed to her couſin Boaz; pretty ſtuff, indeed, you exclaim, to be called the Word of God!"—It ſeems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expreſſion—the Word of God—or the divine authority of the ſcriptures:—I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late biſhop of Carliſle, and in thoſe of St. Auſtin. My firſt quotation is from biſhop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeſerving your notice.—"The true ſenſe then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Teſtament, and which perhaps is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inſpired*, ſeems to be this; that as in thoſe times God has all along, beſide the inſpection, or ſuperintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occaſions, by giving expreſs commiſſions to ſome perſons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evidence, as beſt ſuited the occaſion, time, and nature of the ſubject; and in alr

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other caſes, leſt them wholly to themſelves: in like manner, he has interpoſed his more immediate aſſiſtance, (and notified it to them, as they did to the world,) in the *recording* of theſe revelations; ſo far as that was neceſſary, amidſt the common (but from hence termed *ſacred*) hiſtory of thoſe times; and mixed with various other occurrences; in which the hiſtorian's own natural qualifications were ſufficient to enable him to relate things, with all the accuracy they required."—The paſſage from St. Auſtin is this—"I am of opinion, that thoſe men to whom the Holy Ghoſt revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write ſome things as men with hiſtorical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inſpiration; and that theſe things are ſo diſtinct, that the former may be attributed to themſelves as contributing to the increaſe of knowledge, and the latter to God ſpeaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion."—Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire; it is the opinion of many learned men and good chriſtians: and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will ſee cauſe, perhaps to become a chriſtian yourſelf; you will ſee cauſe to conſider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent miſtakes or real contradictions as to hiſtorical facts—needleſs repetitions and trifling interpolations—indeed you will ſee cauſe to conſider all the principal objections of your book to be abſolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as compoſed by upright and well-informed, though, in ſome points, fallible men, (for I exclude all fallibility when they profeſs to deliver the Word of God,) and you muſt receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the expreſs will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary hiſtory of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to

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other hiſtorians; believe them to deliver the Word of God, when they tell you that they do ſo; believe, when they relate other things as of themſelves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the beſt of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief ſomething very different from a deiſt: you may not be allowed to aſpire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible; though you ſhould admit human miſtakes and human opinions to exiſt in ſome parts of it. This I take to be the firſt ſtep towards the removal of the doubts of many ſceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God, aſſiſting a teachable diſpoſition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a ſtrolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, ſhe accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her huſband and her two ſons ſhe had been driven by a famine. The diſturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America: if, ten years hence, a woman, having loſt her huſband and her children, ſhould return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be juſtified in calling the daughter-in-law a ſtrolling country girl?—"But ſhe crept ſlily to bed to her couſin Boaz."—I do not find it ſo in the hiſtory—as a perſon imploring protection, ſhe laid herſelf down at the foot of an aged kinſman's bed, and ſhe roſe up with as much innocence as ſhe had laid herſelf down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the ſimplicity of ancient manners, will find it an intereſting

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ſtory of a poor young woman, following in a ſtrange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herſelf to the fortunes of the mother of her deceaſed huſband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review.—You proceed to ſhew that theſe books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have ſaid upon the fallacy of your concluſion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have ſpared yourſelf ſome trouble if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the ſecond book which bears his name, and only a part of the firſt. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeſerving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men reſpecting the authors of the ſeveral books of the Bible; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raiſing, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on this ſubject: but that you may have ſome knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a paſſage from Dr. Hartley's obſervations on man. The author himſelf does not vouch for the truth of his obſervation, for he begins it with a ſuppoſition.—"I ſuppoſe then, that the Pentateuch conſiſts of the writings of *Moſes*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions; that the books of Joſhua and Judges were, in like manner, collected by him; and the book of Ruth, with the firſt part of the firſt book of Samuel, written by him; that the latter part of the firſt book of Samuel, and the ſecond book, were written by the prophets who ſucceeded Samuel, ſuppoſe *Nathan* and *Gad*; that the books of Kings and Chronicles,

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are extracts from the records of the ſucceeding prophets, concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by *Ezra*; that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are collections of like records, ſome written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and ſome by their predeceſſors; that the book of Eſther was written by ſome eminent jew, in or near the times of the tranſaction there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai*; the book of Job by a jew, of an uncertain time; the Pſalms by David, and other pious perſons; the books of the Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon*; the book of Eccleſiaſtes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a jew of later times, ſpeaking in his perſon, but not with an intention to make him paſs for the author; the prophecies by the prophets whoſe names they bear; and the books of the New Teſtament by the perſons to whom they are uſually aſcribed."—I have produced this paſſage to you not merely to ſhew you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no perſon is intereſted in defending; but to convince you, that a wiſe and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for ſuch was Dr. Hartley, and no prieſt, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Teſtament as books without authority. I ſhall not trouble either you or myſelf with any more obſervations on that head; you may aſcribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you pleaſe; I am ſatisfied with knowing that the annals of the jewiſh nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably, in all ſucceeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this obſervation we have abundant proof, not only from the teſtimony of Joſephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Teſtament itſelf. I will content myſelf with citing a few places—"Now the acts of David the king, firſt and laſt, behold they are written

written in the book of Samuel the ſeer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the ſeer." 1 Chron. xxix. 29.—" Now the reſt of the acts of Solomon, firſt and laſt, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the viſions of Iddo the ſeer?" 2 Chron. ix. 29.—" Now the acts of Rehoboam, firſt and laſt, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the ſeer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron. xii. 15.—" Now the reſt of the acts of Jehoſhaphat, firſt and laſt, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the ſon of Hanani." 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it poſſible for writers to give a ſtronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their hiſtory?

" The two books of Kings," you ſay, " are little more than an hiſtory of aſſaſſinations, treachery, and war." That the kings of Iſrael and Judah were many of them very wicked perſons, is evident from the hiſtory which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered, that their wickedneſs is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Iſrael choſen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedneſs; nor was their being choſen, a cauſe of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced ſo many ſingular marks of God's goodneſs towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be, (what, however, they have long been,) ſtrenuous advocates for the worſhip of one only God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpoſe for which they were choſen, and this purpoſe has been accompliſhed. For above three and twenty hundred years the jews have uniformly witneſſed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon " the appellation of

of the jews being God's *choſen* people as a *lie* which the prieſts and leaders of the jews had invented to cover the baſeneſs of their own characters, and which chriſtian prieſts, ſometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have profeſſed to believe," I will plainly ſtate to you the reaſons which induce me to believe that it is no *lie*, and I hope they will be ſuch reaſons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the univerſality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its ſurface, will not appear (excluſive of the divinity of their ſouls) of more importance than an hillock of ants; all of which, ſome with corn, ſome with eggs, ſome without any thing, run hither and thither, buſtling about a little heap of duſt.—This is a thought of the immortal Bacon; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philoſophy, attempting to preſcribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as eaſily circumſcribe infinity, as penetrate the ſecret purpoſes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the nature of the Supreme Being,—by reaſon, and by revelation; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now my reaſon informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with reſpect to their capacity of enjoying happineſs. Every kind is perfect in its order; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly ſuperior to another. An animal, which has but one ſenſe, has but one ſource of happineſs; but if it be ſupplied with what is ſuited to that ſenſe, it enjoys all the happineſs of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other ſorts of animals, which have two or three ſenſes, and which have alſo abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much

much happineſs as thoſe do which have but one. In the ſame ſort of animals there is a great difference amongſt individuals, one having the ſenſes more perfect, and the body leſs ſubject to diſeaſe, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the divine goodneſs by this uſe of my reaſon, I could not but ſay that it was partial and unequal.—"What ſhall we ſay then? is God unjuſt? God forbid!" His goodneſs may be unequal, without being imperfect; it muſt be eſtimated from the whole, and not from a part. Every order of beings is ſo ſufficient for its own happineſs, and ſo conducive at the ſame time to the happineſs of every other, that in one view it ſeems to be made for itſelf alone, and in another not for itſelf but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immenſe fabric which God hath formed, I am perſuaded that we ſhould ſee nothing but perfection, harmony, and beauty, in every part of it; but whilſt we diſpute about parts, we neglect the whole, and diſcern nothing but ſuppoſed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ſhip, is not to be blamed becauſe a ſpectator cannot diſcover either the beauty or the uſe of disjointed parts. And ſhall we dare to accuſe God of injuſtice, for not having diſtributed the gifts of nature in the ſame degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of diſtribution may be the mean of producing the greateſt ſum total of happineſs to the whole ſyſtem? In exactly the ſame manner may we reaſon concerning the acts of God's eſpecial providence. If we conſider any one act, ſuch as that of appointing the jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial diſplay of his goodneſs; it may excite doubts concerning the wiſdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the hiſtory of the jews with that of other nations, from the

the moſt remote antiquity to the preſent time, we ſhall diſcover that they were not choſen ſo much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are ſtill to all civilized nations, a beacon ſet upon an hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the ſanctuary of a God holy, juſt, and good. Why ſhould we ſuſpect ſuch a diſpenſation of being a *lie?* when even from the little which we can underſtand of it, we ſee that it is founded in wiſdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reaſon teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things you obſerve are mentioned in the book of the Kings, ſuch as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the aſcent of Elijah into heaven, the deſtruction of the children who mocked Eliſha, and the reſurrection of a dead man:—theſe circumſtances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I eſteem it a very erroneous mode of reaſoning, which, from the ſilence of one author concerning a particular circumſtance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it. And this obſervation is ſtill more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a ſupplement to, or an abridgment of, other books: and under this deſcription the book of Chronicles has been conſidered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you ſay to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future deſtruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings xiii. 2.—"Behold, a child ſhall be born unto the houſe of Dávid, Joſiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) ſhall he offer the prieſts of the

high places."—Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular perſon are deſcribed in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Chriſt. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by conſulting the ſecond book of Kings, (chap. xxiii. 15, 16.) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Geneſis was not written till 800 years after Moſes, and that it is of the ſame age, and you may probably think of the ſame authority, as Æſop's Fables. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of demonſtration—" It has but two ſtages:—firſt, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Geneſis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Geneſis was written after the book of Chronicles:—ſecondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whoſe time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jeruſalem, 588 years before Chriſt, and more than 860 after Moſes."—Having anſwered this objection before, I might be excuſed taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the ſtrength of your argument, I will ſhew you its weakneſs, when it is properly ſtated.—A *few verſes* in the book of Geneſis could not be written by Moſes; *therefore no part* of Geneſis could be written by Moſes:—a child would deny your *therefore*.—Again, a few verſes in the book of Geneſis could not be written by *Moſes*, becauſe they ſpeak of kings of Iſrael, there having been no kings of Iſrael in the time of Moſes; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or by any other perſon who lived after there were kings in Iſrael, except by the author of the book of Chronicles:—this is alſo an illegitimate inference from your poſition.—Again, a few verſes in the book of Geneſis are, word for word, the ſame as a few verſes in the book of Chronicles; *therefore* the author of the

the book of Geneſis muſt have taken them from Chronicles:—another lame concluſion! Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Geneſis, as he has taken many other genealogies, ſuppoſing them to have been inſerted in Geneſis by Samuel? But where, you may aſk, could Samuel, or any other perſon, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inſpection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needleſs to employ more time on the ſubject.

LETTER V.

AT length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Chriſt; but then you ſay, "Thoſe accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other perſons, unleſs it be to the jews, as a part of the hiſtory of their nation; and there is juſt as much of the Word of God in thoſe books, as there is in any of the hiſtories of France, or in Rapin's Hiſtory of England." Here let us ſtop a moment, and try if from your own conceſſions it be not poſſible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books —"but they are nothing to us!" The very firſt

verſe of Ezra ſays—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled:—is it nothing to us know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the ſons of men a knowledge of future events, ſo that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-ſix years before Chriſt, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joſhua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Geneſis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the hiſtory of the Iſraelitiſh nation from Abraham to that very time?—Is it nothing to us to know that the hiſtory of the jews is true?—It is every thing to us; for if that hiſtory be not true, chriſtianity muſt be falſe. The jews are the root, we are branches "graffed in amongſt them;" to them pertain "the adoption, and glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the ſervice of God, and the promiſes; whoſe are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the fleſh, Chriſt came, who is over all, God bleſſed for ever. Amen."

The hiſtory of the Old Teſtament has, without doubt, ſome difficulties in it; but a minute philoſopher, who buſies himſelf in ſearching them out, whilſt he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wiſdom and goodneſs of God diſplayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in ſurveying a picture, objects to the ſimplicity of the deſign, and the beauty of the execution, from the aſperities he has diſcovered in the canvaſs and the colouring. The hiſtory of the Old Teſtament, notwithſtanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithſtanding the ſcoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have ſuch internal evidences of its truth, to be ſo corroborated by the moſt ancient profane hiſtories,

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ſo confirmed by the preſent circumſtances of the world, that if I were not a chriſtian, I would become a jew. You think this hiſtory to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blaſphemies: I look upon it to be the oldeſt, the trueſt, the moſt comprehenſive, and the moſt important hiſtory in the world. I conſider it as giving more ſatisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever were attained by the deepeſt reſearches of the moſt enlightened philoſophers. The exerciſe of our reaſon in the inveſtigation of truths reſpecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly uſeful; but I hope I ſhall be pardoned by the metaphyſicians in ſaying, that the chief utility of ſuch diſquiſitions conſiſts in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakneſs of our intellectual faculties. I do not preſume to meaſure other men by my ſtandard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of ſpace; of the eternity of duration; of neceſſary exiſtence; of the connection between neceſſary exiſtence and intelligence, between intelligence and benevolence: you may ſee nothing in the univerſe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may ſee nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, ſick of diſputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the beſt uſe of my reaſon in matters of the utmoſt importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a ſubject within the reach of human capacity; you have come to one concluſion reſpecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error!

You ridicule, in a note, the ſtory of an angel appearing to Joſhua. Your mirth you will perceive

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to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquests to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known, that this rite was an indication of reverence for the divine presence; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book: but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record it is not to be depended on; and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and shew your own skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a כ for a ב (or 2 for 20,) a ג for a נ (or 3 for 50,) a ז for a ר (or 5 for 200.) Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, to this obvious source of error—

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the inattention of the tranſcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I ſhould extend theſe letters to a length troubleſome to the reader, to you, and to myſelf, if I anſwered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be ſufficient briefly to notice ſome of the chief. The character repreſented in Job under the name of Satan is, you ſay, "the firſt and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible." Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Teſtament; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22. "What have I to do with you, ye ſons of Zeruiah, that ye ſhould this day be adverſaries unto me?" In the original it is ſatans unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4. "The Lord my God hath given me reſt on every ſide, ſo that there is neither adverſary, nor evil occurrent"—in the original, neither ſatan nor evil. I need not mention other places; theſe are ſufficient to ſhew, that the word ſatan, denoting an adverſary, does occur in various places of the Old Teſtament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root ſatan was introduced into the Hebrew and other eaſtern languages, to denote an adverſary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word ſatan is not older than the Babylonian captivity: this is a miſtake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth pſalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this ſubject, permit me to recommend to your conſideration the univerſality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had oppoſed himſelf, who ſtill continues to oppoſe himſelf, to the ſupreme ſource of all good. Amongſt all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were ſubject to the will of the gods, and regulated by

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their interpoſition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering ſtars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Oſiris*—the Perſian *Arimanius* and *Oromaſdes*—the Grecian *celeſtial* and *infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans—the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the ſtructure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of hiſtory or drama, it be conſidered. Now does it not appear reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that an opinion ſo ancient and ſo univerſal has ariſen from tradition concerning the fall of our firſt parents; diſfigured, indeed, and obſcured, as all traditions muſt be, by many fabulous additions?

The jews, you tell us, "never prayed but when they were in trouble." I do not believe this of the jews; but that they prayed more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and all individuals.—But "the jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches."—Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and bluſh for your aſſertion,—illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

It appears, you obſerve, "to have been the cuſtom of the heathens to perſonify both virtue and vice, by ſtatues and images, as is done now-a-days both by ſtatuary and by painting; but it does not follow from this that they worſhipped them any more than we do." Not worſhipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar ſet up? Was it not worſhipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worſhipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman ſenate for fetching the ſtatue of the mother

of

of the gods from Peſſinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanſhip? Not worſhipped them! "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Epheſians was a worſhipper of the great goddeſs Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worſhipped them!"—The worſhip was univerſal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houſes of the high places, which the Samaritans had made—the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Aſhima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this your curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worſhip the moſt cruel, ſenſeleſs, impure, abominable, tnat can poſſibly diſgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have ſaved *Micah's teraphims*, the *golden calves of Jeroboam, and of Aaron*, and quite ſuperſeded the neceſſity of the ſecond commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the ſtatue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry ſhould again be in repute, ſeems to have had ſome foundation for his improper humour, ſome knowledge that certain men eſteeming themſelves great philoſophers had entered into a conſpiracy to aboliſh chriſtianity, ſome foreſight of the conſequences which will certainly attend their ſucceſs.

It is an error, you ſay, to call the Pſalms—the Pſalms of David.—This error was obſerved by St. Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are—"We know that they are in an error who attribute all the Pſalms to David."—You, I ſuppoſe,

ſuppoſe, will not deny, that David wrote ſome of them. Songs are of various ſorts: we have hunting ſongs, drinking ſongs, fighting ſongs, love ſongs, fooliſh, wanton, wicked ſongs:—if you will have the "Pſalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different ſong-writers," you muſt allow that the writers of them were inſpired by no ordinary ſpirit; that it is a collection, incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Pſalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verſes of Pythagoras, the choruſes of the Greek tragedians, (no contemptible compoſitions any of theſe,) and you will quickly ſee how greatly it ſurpaſſes them all, in piety of ſentiment, in ſublimity of expreſſion, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you eſteem the Pſalms of David a ſong book, it is conſiſtent enough in you to eſteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jeſt book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jeſts; if we had the whole three thouſand, which he wrote, our mirth would be extreme. Let us open the book, and ſee what kind of jeſts it contains; take the very firſt as a ſpecimen—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools deſpiſe wiſdom and inſtruction."—Do you perceive any jeſt in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean?—He means that Lord who took the poſterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people—who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interpoſition of his power—who gave the law to Moſes—who commanded the Iſraelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan.—Now this Lord you will not fear; the jeſt ſays, you deſpiſe wiſdom and inſtruction.—Let us try again—"My ſon, hear the inſtruction of thy father, and forſake not the law of thy mother."

mother."—If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings, you will ſee no jeſt in this.—Once more—"My ſon, if ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not."—Theſe are the three firſt proverbs in Solomon's "jeſt book;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wiſe; that it will teach you, at leaſt, the beginning of wiſdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jeſters are ſometimes witty; but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wiſdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wiſdom. Solomon "was wiſer than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the ſons of Mahol."—Theſe men you may think were jeſters; and ſo you may call the ſeven wiſe men of Greece: but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiſer than them all, was nothing but a witty jeſter. As to the ſins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them? and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable ſermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Iſaiah has a greater ſhare of your abuſe than any other writer in the Old Teſtament, and the reaſon of it is obvious—the prophecies of Iſaiah have received ſuch a full and circumſtantial completion, that, unleſs you can perſuade yourſelf to conſider the whole book (a few hiſtorical ſketches excepted) "as one continued bombaſtical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and deſtitute of meaning," you muſt of neceſſity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Damaſcus, and the other denunciations of the prophet againſt cities and kingdoms, to the ſtory

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" of the knight of the burning mountain, the ſtory of Cinderilla, &c." I may have read theſe ſtories, but I remember nothing of the ſubjects of them; I have read alſo Iſaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the paſt and preſent ſtate of Babylon, and the compariſon has made ſuch an impreſſion on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I ſhall never ceaſe to believe that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more diſtinctly known than paſt or preſent things are by man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Iſaiah the ſubject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty fourth, and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Iſaiah, are, in your opinion, ſo far from being written by Iſaiah, that they could only have been written by ſome perſon who lived at leaſt an hundred and fifty years after Iſaiah was dead:—theſe chapters, you go on, " are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the jews to return to Jeruſalem from the Babylonian captivity above one hundred and fifty years after the death of Iſaiah:"—and is it for this, Sir, that you accuſe the church of audacity and the prieſts of ignorance, in impoſing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Iſaiah? What ſhall be ſaid of you, who, either deſignedly or ignorantly, repreſent one of the moſt clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an hiſtorical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet?—We contend, Sir, that this is a prophecy and not an hiſtory; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; and deſcribed the means by which he ſhould do it, above an hundred years before Cyrus was born, and when there was no probability of ſuch an event. *Porphyry* could not reſiſt the evidence of *Daniel*'s prophecies, but by ſaying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could

could not reſiſt the evidence of the prediction of *Jeſus*, concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, but by ſaying, that the account was written after Jeruſalem had been deſtroyed; and you, at length, (though, for aught I know, you may have had predeceſſors in this preſumption,) unable to reſiſt the evidence of *Iſaiah*'s prophecies, contend that they are bombaſtical rant, without application, though the application is circumſtantial; and deſtitute of meaning, though the meaning is ſo obvious that it cannot be miſtaken; and that one of the moſt remarkable of them, is not a prophecy, but an hiſtorical compliment written after the event. We will not, Sir, give up Daniel and St. Matthew to the impudent aſſertions of Porphyry and Voltaire, nor will we give up Iſaiah to your aſſertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not aſſertion; we will not relinquiſh our religion, in obedience to your abuſive aſſertion reſpecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful abſurdity of this hypotheſis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to conſider that Cyrus was a Perſian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian ſuperſtition of two independent Beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkneſs and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive jew, meaning to compliment the greateſt prince in the world, ſhould be ſo ſtupid as to tell the prince that his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none elſe, I form the *light*, and create *darkneſs*, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all theſe things."

But if you will perſevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruſe the burden of Babylon; was that alſo written after the event? Were the Medes *then* ſtirred up againſt Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees,

dees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it *then* uninhabited? Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the ſhepherd's fold? Did the wild beaſts of the deſert *then* lie there? Did the wild beaſts of the Iſlands *then* cry in their deſolate houſes, and dragons in their pleaſant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belſhazzar, the ſon and the grandſon, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a poſſeſſion of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* ſwept with the beſom of deſtruction, ſo ſwept that the world knows not now where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad deſigns, deliberate wickedneſs, to you, or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your ſide, and that you are doing ſervice to mankind in endeavouring to root out what you eſteem ſuperſtition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to leſſen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reaſon; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could diſcover, or your induſtry pick up, from the writings of others; and without taking any notice of the anſwers which have been repeatedly given to theſe objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly ſome novelty, at leaſt in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldneſs of aſſertion, and in profaneneſs of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire muſt yield the palm of ſcurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to ſtate to you, what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better ſuited to the character of an honeſt man, ſincere in his endeavours to ſearch out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would, in the firſt place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holineſs, truth, juſtice, goodneſs; whether it repreſented him as

ſubject

ſubject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or aſſigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible, (for the deſtruction of the Canaanites by his expreſs command, I have ſhewn not to be repugnant to his moral juſtice,) he would, in the ſecond place, conſider that the Bible being, as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and diſtant periods, there might, probably, occur ſome difficulties and apparent contradictions in the hiſtorical part of it; he would endeavour to remove theſe difficulties, to reconcile theſe apparent contradictions, by the rules of ſuch ſound criticiſm as he would uſe in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that moſt of them were of a trifling nature, ariſing from ſhort additions inſerted into the text as explanatory and ſupplemental, or from miſtakes and omiſſions of tranſcribers, he would infer that all the reſt were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this conceſſion, from obſerving, that there ran through the whole book an harmony and connection, utterly inconſiſtent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, obſerve, that the miraculous and hiſtorical parts of this book were ſo intermixed, that they could not be ſeparated; that they muſt either both be true, or both falſe; and from finding that the hiſtorical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other hiſtory, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himſelf in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies; well knowing that the prediction of things to come, was as certain a proof of the divine interpoſition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he ſhould find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled

filled in all their circumſtances, and that ſome were fulfilling at this very day, he would not ſuffer a few ſeeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I preſume to think, would be a proper conduct in all thoſe who are deſirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the ſubject of revealed religion.—To return.—

As to your obſervation, that the book of Iſaiah is (at leaſt in tranſlation) that kind of compoſition and falſe taſte, which is properly called proſe run mad—I have only to remark, that your taſte for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from tranſlation, would be more correct if you would ſuffer yourſelf to be informed on the ſubject by Biſhop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections*—" that a poem tranſlated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilſt the ſame forms of the ſentences remain, will ſtill retain, even as far as relates to verſification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of verſification." (Gregory's Tranſ.) If this is what you mean by proſe run mad, your obſervation may be admitted.

You explain at ſome length your notion of the miſapplication made by St. Matthew of the prophecy in Iſaiah—" Behold, a virgin ſhall conceive and bear a ſon " That paſſage has been handled largely and minutely by almoſt every commentator, and it is too important to be handled ſuperficially by any one: I am not on the preſent occaſion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only inſtance you produce—that Iſaiah was " a lying prophet and an impoſtor." Now I maintain, that this very inſtance proves, that he was a true prophet, and no impoſtor. The hiſtory of the prophecy, as delivered in the ſeventh chapter, is this —Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Iſrael, made war upon Ahaz king of Judah; not merely,

or,

or, perhaps, not at all, for the ſake of plunder or the conqueſt of territory, but with a declared purpoſe of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of deſtroying the royal houſe of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpoſe is thus expreſſed—" Let us go up againſt Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and ſet a king in the midſt of it, even the ſon of Tabeal."—Now what did the Lord commiſſion Iſaiah to ſay to Ahaz? Did he commiſſion him to ſay, the kings ſhall not vex thee? No.—The kings ſhall not conquer thee? No.—The kings ſhall not ſucceed againſt thee? No:—he commiſſioned him to ſay, " It (the purpoſe of the two kings) ſhall not ſtand, neither ſhall it come to paſs." I demand—Did it ſtand, did it come to paſs? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal houſe of David dethroned and deſtroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accompliſhed. You ſay, " Inſtead of theſe two kings failing in their attempt againſt Ahaz, they ſucceeded; Ahas was defeated and deſtroyed."—I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not deſtroyed; and even the " two hundred thouſand women, and ſons, and daughters," whom you repreſent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admoniſhed by a prophet, would not ſuffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land—" They roſe up, and took the captives, and with the ſpoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and ſhod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon aſſes (ſome humanity, you ſee, amongſt thoſe Iſraelites, whom you every where repreſent as barbarous brutes), and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren." 2 Chron. xxviii. 15.—The kings

did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to deſtroy the houſe of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not deſtroy the houſe of David, for Ahaz ſlept with his fathers; and Hezekiah, his ſon, of the houſe of David, reigned in his ſtead.

LETTER VI.

AFTER what I conceive to be a great miſrepreſentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection which Spinoza and others before you had much inſiſted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineneſs, nor the authenticity, of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in miſplacing the ſheets of your performance, would leſſen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a diſordered ſtate. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where obſerved; but the cauſe of the confuſion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the ſeveral prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places:—others think that the ſeveral parts of the work were at firſt properly arranged, but that through accident, or the careleſſneſs

neſs of tranſcribers, they were deranged:—others contend, that there is no confuſion; that prophecy differs from hiſtory, in not being ſubject to an accurate obſervance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be ſettled by critical diſcuſſion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your charge againſt Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his falſe prediction. Firſt, as to his duplicity:

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, had been thruſt into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who ſought his life; there he would have periſhed, had not one of the eunuchs taken compaſſion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favour, ſaying, "Theſe men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, (no ſmall teſtimony this, of the probity of the prophet's character,) whom they have caſt into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger."—On this repreſentation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who ſoon afterwards ſent privately for him, and deſired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himſelf, by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who ſought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpoſe of God reſpecting the fate of Jeruſalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preſerve the life of the prophet, diſmiſſed him, ſaying, "Let no man know of theſe words, and thou ſhalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and ſay unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou haſt ſaid unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; alſo what the king ſaid unto thee: then thou ſhalt ſay unto them, I preſented my ſupplication before the king, that he would not cauſe

me to return to Jonathan's houſe to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and aſked him, and he told them according to all theſe words that the king had commanded."—Thus, you remark, " this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very ſtrongly prevaricate, for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his ſupplication, neither did he make it."—It is not ſaid that he told the princes he *went* to make his ſupplication, but that he *preſented* it : now it is ſaid in the preceding chapter, that he did make the ſupplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it ; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil ſociety, in what he did on this occaſion. He told the truth, in part, to ſave his life ; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good ſubjects to his king. " In a matter (ſays Puffendorf,) which I am not *obliged* to declare to another, if I cannot, with ſafety, conceal the whole, I may fairly diſcover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any *obligation* to declare to the princes what had paſſed in his conference with the king ? You may as well ſay, that the houſe of lords has a right to compel privy counſellors to reveal the king's ſecrets. The king cannot juſtly require a privy counſellor to tell a lie for him ; but he may require him not to divulge his *counſels* to thoſe who have no right to know them.—Now for the falſe prediction—I will give the deſcription of it in your own words.

" In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in theſe words, ver. 2.—' Thus ſaith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire ; and thou ſhalt not eſcape out of his hand, but thou ſhalt ſurely be taken, and delivered into his

his hand; and thine eyes ſhall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he ſhall ſpeak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou ſhalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus ſaith the Lord, Thou ſhalt not die by the ſword, but thou ſhalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, ſo ſhall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, ſaying, Ah, Lord! for I have pronounced the word, ſaith the Lord.*'

" Now, inſtead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and ſpeaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himſelf had pronounced), the reverſe, according to the 52d chapter, was the caſe; it is there ſtated, verſe 10, 'That the king of Babylon ſlew the ſons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in priſon till the day of his death.' What can we ſay of theſe prophets, but that they are impoſtors and liars?" I can ſay this—that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then ſhall be ſaid of thoſe who call Jeremiah a liar and an impoſtor? Here then we are fairly at iſſue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. " I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he ſhall burn it with fire:" ſo ſays the prophet; what ſays the hiſtory? " They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the houſe of God, and brake down the walls of Jeruſalem, and burnt all the places thereof with fire." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.) " Thou ſhalt not eſcape out of his hand, but ſhalt ſurely be *taken* and *delivered* into his hand:" ſo ſays the prophet; what ſays the hiſtory?—" The men of war fled by night,

night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees purſued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were ſcattered from him; ſo they *took* the king, and *brought him up to the king of Babylon*, to Riblah." (2 Kings xxv. 5.) The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes ſhall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he ſhall ſpeak with thee mouth to mouth."—No pleaſant circumſtance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The hiſtory ſays, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*ſpake judgments with him* at Riblah." The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou ſhalt go to Babylon;" the hiſtory ſays, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in priſon till the day of his death," Jer. lii. 11.—"Thou ſhalt not die by the ſword." He did not die by the ſword, he did not fall in battle.—"But thou ſhalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack, or on the ſcaffold; was neither ſtrangled, nor impriſoned; no unuſual fate of captive kings! he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a priſon.—"And with the burnings of thy fathers ſhall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the hiſtory that this part of the prophecy was accompliſhed, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accompliſhed; and I have two reaſons on which I ground this probability.—Daniel, Shadrach, Meſchach, and Abednego, to ſay nothing of other jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the impriſonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the ſubverſion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus.—Now it ſeems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the jews, would

would both have inclination to requeſt, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain, permiſſion to bury their deceaſed prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers.—But if there had been no jews at Babylon of conſequence enough to make ſuch a requeſt, ſtill it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conſcious of the inſtability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceaſed, when the inſolence of conqueſt is abated, and the fury of reſentment ſubſided, they ſeldom fail to revere royalty in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obſequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profeſs to have been particular in treating of the books aſcribed to Iſaiah and Jeremiah.—Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three paſſages, which you have endeavoured to repreſent as objectionable, and which I hope have been ſhewn, to the reader's ſatisfaction, to be not juſtly liable to your cenſure; and you have paſſed over all the other parts of theſe books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cauſe to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many inſtances of ſublime compoſition; and, what is of more conſequence, with many inſtances of prophetical veracity:—particularities of theſe kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a diſhoneſt man; am I juſtified in conſidering you as a man not altogether deſtitute of ingenuity, but ſo entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing reſpecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge previouſly determined to give ſentence on

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one ſide, you are negligent in the examination of truth?

You proceed to the reſt of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however ſelecting for your obſervations ſuch particularities as are beſt calculated to render, if poſſible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and muſicians: I would diſtinguiſh them thus; many prophets were poets and muſicians, but all poets and muſicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and meaſure; but flights and metaphors of the jewiſh poets have not, as you affirm, been fooliſhly erected into what are now called prophecies—they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies,—becauſe they were real predictions, ſome of which have received, ſome are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accompliſhment.

That there were falſe prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurers, fortune-tellers, among the jews, no perſon will attempt to deny; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them: but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Teſtament to a level with theſe conjuring, dreaming, ſtrolling gentry—when you would repreſent them as ſpending their lives in fortune-telling, caſting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for loſt goods, &c. I muſt be allowed to ſay, that you wholly miſtake their office, and miſrepreſent their character: their office was to convey to the children of Iſrael the commands, the promiſes and the threatenings of almighty God; and their character was that of men ſuſtaining, with fortitude, perſecution in the diſcharge of their duty. There were falſe prophets in abundance amongſt the jews; and if you oppoſe theſe to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty

liberty of doing ſo, but you will not thereby confound the diſtinction between truth and falſehood. Falſe prophets are ſpoken of with deteſtation in many parts of ſcripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuſes them of prophefying lies in the name of the Lord, ſaying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed: —Behold, I am againſt the prophets, ſaith the Lord, that uſe their tongues, and ſay, He ſaith; that prophefy falſe dreams, and cauſe my people to err by their lies and by their lightneſs." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen againſt giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their ſorcerers, "which ſpeak unto you, ſaying, Ye ſhall not ſerve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of theſe gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah ſays on this ſubject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the falſe prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuſe; but who argues againſt the uſe of a thing from the abuſe of it? againſt phyſicians, becauſe there are pretenders to phyſic? Was Iſaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he ſaid to king Hezekiah, "Behold, the days come, that all this in thine houſe, and that which thy fathers have laid up in ſtore until this day, ſhall be carried to Babylon: nothing ſhall be left, ſaith the Lord. And of thy ſons that ſhall iſſue from thee, which thou ſhalt beget, ſhall they take away, and they ſhall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their ſimple cuſtomers, that they may make ſomething by their trade; but Iſaiah predicts to a monarch deſolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was ſpoken in the year before Chriſt 713; and, above an hundred years afterwards, it was accompliſhed; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jeruſalem,

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and carried out thence all the treaſures of the houſe of the Lord, and the treaſures of the king's houſe, (2 Kings xxiv. 13.) and when he commanded the maſter of his eunuchs, (Dan. i. 3) that he ſhould take certain of the children of Iſrael, and of the king's ſeed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to ſtand before the king.

Jehoram king of Iſrael, Jehoſhaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this diſtreſs they waited upon Eliſha, (an high honour for one of your conjurors,) by the advice of Jehoſhaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on ſeeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worſhip of the true God, come to conſult him, ſaid to him—"Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother."—This you think ſhews Eliſha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity—it ſhews him to have been a man of great courage, who reſpected the dignity of his own character, the ſacredneſs of his office as a prophet of God, whoſe duty it was to reprove the wickedneſs of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches:—this, you ſay, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it:"—but this is not a true repreſentation of the caſe; the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it ſhould miraculouſly come "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water."—As to Eliſha's curſing the little children who had mocked him, and their deſtruction in conſequence of his

his imprecation, the whole ſtory muſt be taken together. The provocation he received, is, by ſome, conſidered as an inſult offered to him, not as a man but as a prophet, and that the perſons who offered it were not what we underſtand by little children, but grown-up youths; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown-up perſons. Be this as it may, the curſing was the act of the prophet; had it been a ſin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous deſtruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who beſt knows who deſerve puniſhment. What effect ſuch a ſignal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where ſaid; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from ſome of the greateſt adverſaries of chriſtianity; and in my opinion cut up, by this conceſſion, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impoſſibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuſe his aſſent to the truth of chriſtianity. As to your ſaying, that the interpretations which commentators and prieſts have made of theſe books, only ſhew the fraud, or the extreme folly, to which credulity and prieſtcraft can go, I conſider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philoſopher. You profeſs a fondneſs for ſcience; I will refer you to a ſcientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a prieſt,—to Ferguſon.—In a tract entitled—The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion aſcertained; and the darkneſs, at the time of his crucifixion, proved to be ſupernatural—this real philoſopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes

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concludes his diſſertation in the following words—"Thus we have an aſtronomical demonſtration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, ſeeing that the prophetic year of the Meſſiah's being cut off, was the very ſame with the aſtronomical." I have ſomewhere read an account of a ſolemn diſputation which was held at Venice, in the laſt century, between a jew and a chriſtian:—the chriſtian ſtrongly argued from Daniel's prophecy of the ſeventy weeks, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah whom the jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets:—the learned Rabbi, who preſided at this diſputation, was ſo forcibly ſtruck by the argument, that he put an end to the buſineſs, by ſaying—"Let us ſhut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become chriſtians."—Was it a ſimilar apprehenſion which deterred you from ſo much as opening the book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable paſſage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiaſſed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy—"Let him that readeth underſtand"—and I ſhall not deſpair of your converſion from deiſm to chriſtianity.

In order to diſcredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a ſtrange and prodigious hypotheſis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in hiſtory or probability. You ſuppoſe theſe two men to have had no dreams, no viſions, no revelation from God Almighty; but to have pretended to theſe things; and, under that diſguiſe, to have carried on an enigmatical correſpondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his ſenſes ſhould frame or adopt ſuch an hypotheſis, ſhould have ſo little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer

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after truth, ſo little reſpect for the underſtanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumſtance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a chapter in Ezekiel; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, ſpeaking of Egypt, it is ſaid—"No foot of man ſhall paſs through it, nor foot of beaſt ſhall paſs through it, neither ſhall it be inhabited forty years:"—this, you ſay, "never came to paſs, and conſequently it is falſe, as all the books I have already reviewed are." Now that this did come to paſs, we have, as Biſhop Newton obſerves, "the teſtimonies of Megaſthenes and Beroſus, two heathen hiſtorians, who lived about 300 years before Chriſt; one of whom affirms, expreſsly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in ſaying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having ſettled his affairs *in Egypt*, and committed the *captives* whom he took in Egypt to the care of ſome of his friends to bring them after him, he haſted directly to Babylon." And if we had been poſſeſſed of no teſtimony in ſupport of the prophecy, it would have been a haſty concluſion, that the prophecy never came to paſs; the hiſtory of Egypt, at ſo remote a period, being no where accurately and circumſtantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out from the age of Ezekiel to the preſent, in which there was no foot of man or beaſt to be ſeen for forty years in all Egypt; but ſome think that only a part of Egypt is here ſpoken of; and ſurely you do not expect a literal accompliſhment of an hyperbolical expreſſion, denoting great deſolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at preſent, by caravans, by the foot of man and beaſt, ſhould be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have

have made your quotation, you would have there ſeen a prophecy delivered above two thouſand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this—" Egypt ſhall be the baſeſt of the kingdoms, neither ſhall it exalt itſelf any more above the nations —there ſhall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt."—This you may call a dream, a viſion, a lie: I eſteem it a wonderful prophecy; for " as is the prophecy, ſo has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Perſians; and after the Perſians it became ſubject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamalucs; and is now a province of the Turkiſh empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author not an enigmatical letter to Daniel reſpecting the recovery of Jeruſalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jeruſalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans.—" I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet ſhall he not *ſee* it, though he ſhall die there."—How! not ſee Babylon, when he ſhould die there! How, moreover, is this conſiſtent, you may aſk, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah ſhould ſee the eyes of the king of Babylon?—This darkneſs of expreſſion, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Joſephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced, and the fact is worthy your obſervation, the truth of them both. He ſaw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he ſaw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

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As to your wonderful diſcovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of ſome gentile, " and that it has been written as a fable, to expoſe the nonſenſe, and to ſatirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting prieſt," I ſhall put it, covered with *hellebore*, for the ſervice of its author, on the ſame ſhelf with your hypotheſis concerning the conſpiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and ſhall not ſay another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Teſtament in a triumphant ſtyle; an angry opponent would ſay, in a ſtyle of extreme arrogance, and ſottiſh ſelf-ſufficiency — " I have gone," you ſay, " through the Bible (miſtaking here, as in other places, the Old Teſtament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his ſhoulders, and fell trees; here they lie; and the prieſts, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, ſtick them in the ground, but they will never grow."—And is it poſſible that you ſhould think ſo highly of your performance, as to believe, that you have thereby demoliſhed the authority of a book, which Newton himſelf eſteemed the moſt authentic of all hiſtories; which, by its celeſtial light, illumines the darkeſt ages of antiquity; which is the touchſtone whereby we are enabled to diſtinguiſh between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Iſrael, holy, juſt, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philoſophy of Plato; which has been illuſtrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its ſublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and underſtand it? No, Sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the beſt intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely

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buſied yourſelf in expoſing to vulgar contempt a few unſightly ſhrubs, which good men had concealed from public view; you have entangled yourſelf in thickets of thorns and briars; you have loſt your way on the mountains of Lebanon; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madneſs, and pitying the blindneſs of your rage againſt them, have ſcorned the blunt edge and the baſe temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleneſs of your ſtroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Teſtament hunting after difficulties, and you have found ſome real ones; theſe you have endeavoured to magnify into inſurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is conſidered that the Old Teſtament is compoſed of ſeveral books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moſes to Malachi, compriſing an abſtracted hiſtory of a particular nation for above a thouſand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much leſs importance, than could reaſonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have repreſented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held moſt ſacred, and calumniated characters eſteemed moſt venerable; you have excited the ſcoffs of the profane; increaſed the ſcepticiſm of the doubtful; ſhaken the faith of the unlearned; ſuggeſted cavils to the "diſputers of this world;" and perplexed the minds of honeſt men who wiſh to worſhip the God of their fathers in ſincerity and truth. —This and more you have done in going through the Old Teſtament; but you have not ſo much as glanced at the great deſign of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the ſeveral parts. You have ſaid nothing of the wiſdom of God in ſelecting a particular people from the reſt of mankind,

mankind, not for their own ſakes, but that they might witneſs to the whole world, in ſucceſſive ages, his exiſtence and attributes; that they might be an inſtrument of ſubverting idolatry; of declaring the name of the God of Iſrael throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians ſaw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedneſs had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians iſſued their decrees—"That none ſhould dare to ſpeak amiſs of the God of Iſrael—that all ſhould fear and tremble before him:"—and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worſhippers of idols. You have ſaid nothing of the goodneſs of God in promiſing, that through the ſeed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be bleſſed; that the deſire of all nations, the bleſſing of Abraham to the gentiles, ſhould come. You have paſſed by all the prophecies reſpecting the coming of the Meſſiah; though they abſolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; deſcribed his office, character, condition, ſufferings, and death, in ſo circumſtantial a manner, that we cannot but be aſtoniſhed at the accuracy of their completion in the perſon of Jeſus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the teſtimony of the whole jewiſh nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Teſtament. That we may better judge of the weight of this teſtimony, let us ſuppoſe that God ſhould now manifeſt himſelf to us, as we contend he did to the Iſraelites in Egypt, in the deſert, and in the land of Canaan; and that he ſhould continue theſe manifeſtations of himſelf to our poſterity for a thouſand years or more, puniſhing or rewarding them according as they diſobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect ſhould be the iſſue? You would expect that our poſterity would,

in the remoteſt period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain againſt all opponents the truth of the books in which the diſpenſations of God to us and to our ſucceſſors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the ſame divine government, ſhould, for want of ſuch experience, refuſe aſſent to their teſtimony. No; they would be to the then ſurrounding nations, what the jews are to us, witneſſes of the exiſtence and of the moral government of God.

LETTER VII.

" THE New Teſtament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if ſo, it muſt follow the fate of its foundation."—Thus you open your attack upon the New Teſtament; and I agree with you, that the New Teſtament muſt follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by ſuch efforts as you have made againſt it. The New Teſtament, however, is not founded ſolely on the prophecies of the Old. If an heathen from *Athens* or *Rome*, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, had been an eye-witneſs of the miracles of Jeſus, he would have made the ſame concluſion that the jew Nicodemus did—" Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do theſe miracles that thou doeſt, except God be with him."—Our Saviour tells the jews—" Had ye believed Moſes, ye would

would have believed me; for he wrote of me:"—and he bids them ſearch the ſcriptures, for they teſtified of him:—but, notwithſtanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, Jeſus ſaid to the jews, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works"—"believe me for the very works' ſake"—"if I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had ſin." —Theſe are ſufficient proofs that the truth of Chriſt's miſſion was not even to the jews, much leſs to the gentiles, founded ſolely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Teſtament.—So that if you could prove ſome of theſe prophecies to have been miſapplied, and not completed in the perſon of Jeſus, the truth of the chriſtian religion would not thereby be overturned.—That Jeſus of Nazareth was the perſon, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Teſtament, reſpecting the Meſſiah, were fulfilled, is a propoſition founded on thoſe prophecies, and to be proved by comparing with the hiſtory of his life. That Jeſus was *a* prophet ſent from God, is one propoſition—that Jeſus was *the* prophet, the Meſſiah, is another; and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of theſe propoſitions are ſeparate and diſtinct.

The mere exiſtence "of ſuch a woman as Mary, and of ſuch a man as Joſeph, and Jeſus," is, you ſay, a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to diſbelieve—Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here ſeem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its part—and we know that all the angles in the ſame ſegment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonſtration as grounds of this knowledge; but is there no ground for belief of paſt or future exiſtence? Is there no ground for believing that the ſun will exiſt to-mor-

row, and that your father exiſted before you? You condeſcend, however, to think it probable, that there were ſuch perſons as Mary, Joſeph, and Jeſus; and, without troubling yourſelf about their exiſtence or non-exiſtence, aſſuming, as it were, for the ſake of argument, but without poſitively granting, their exiſtence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jeſus Chriſt, as told in the New Teſtament, and the wild and viſionary doctrine raiſed thereon," againſt which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was ſuch a man as Jeſus Chriſt; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jeruſalem; that he had ſeveral followers who conſtantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his diſciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been obſerved in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or ſuppoſed reſurrection; and that the conſtant celebration of baptiſm, and of the Lord's ſupper, may be traced back from the preſent time to him, as the author of thoſe inſtitutions. Theſe things conſtitute, I ſuppoſe, no part of your fable; and if theſe things be facts, they will, when maturely conſidered, draw after them ſo many other things related in the New Teſtament concerning Jeſus, that there will be left for your fable but very ſcanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dreſs them up into any form which will not diſguſt even a ſuperficial obſerver.

The miraculous conception you eſteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obſcene fable.—Impure indeed muſt that man's imagination be, who can diſcover any obſcenity in the angel's declaration to Mary.

Mary.—" The Holy Ghoſt ſhall come upon thee, and the power of the Higheſt ſhall overſhadow thee : therefore that Holy thing which ſhall be born of thee ſhall be called the Son of God."—I wonder you do not find obſcenity in Geneſis, where it is ſaid, " The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confuſion, a world out of a chaos, by his foſtering influence. As to the chriſtian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the aſſertion ; there would have been ſome for ſaying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Teſtament.

You come now to a demonſtration, or, which amounts to the ſame thing, to a propoſition which cannot, you ſay, be controverted :—firſt, " That the *agreement* of all the parts of a ſtory does not prove that ſtory to be true, becauſe the parts may agree and the whole may be falſe ;—ſecondly, That the *diſagreement* of the parts of a ſtory proves that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the diſagreement proves falſehood poſitively." Great uſe, I perceive, is to be made of this propoſition. You will pardon my unſkilfulneſs in dialectics, if I preſume to controvert the truth of this abſtract propoſition, as applied to any purpoſe in life. The agreement of the parts of a ſtory implies that the ſtory has been told by, at leaſt, two perſons (the life of Doctor Johnſon, for inſtance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boſwel). Now I think it ſcarcely poſſible for even two perſons, and the difficulty is increaſed if there are more than two, to write the hiſtory of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a conſiderable difference between them, with reſpect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other ; ſome things will be briefly touched by one, and the ſame

ſame things will be circumſtantially detailed by the other ; the ſame things which are mentioned in the ſame way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the ſame point of time, with other poſſible and probable differences. But theſe real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumſtances, will not invalidate their teſtimony as to the material tranſactions of his life, much leſs will they render the whole of it a fable. If ſeveral independent witneſſes, of fair character, ſhould agree in all the parts of a ſtory, (in teſtifying, for inſtance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of juſtice in the world would admit the fact, notwithſtanding the abſtract poſſibility of the whole being falſe :—again, if ſeveral honeſt men ſhould agree in ſaying, that they ſaw the king of France beheaded, though they ſhould diſagree as to the figure of the guillotine, or the ſize of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or looſe, as to his being compoſed or agitated in aſcending the ſcaffold, yet every court of juſtice in the world would think, that ſuch difference, reſpecting the circumſtances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence reſpecting the fact itſelf. When you ſpeak of the whole of a ſtory, you cannot mean every particular circumſtance connected with the ſtory, but not eſſential to it; you muſt mean the pith and marrow of the ſtory; for it would be impoſſible to eſtabliſh the truth of any fact, (of admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty,) if a diſagreement in the evidence of witneſſes, in minute points, ſhould be conſidered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs eſſentially from the demonſtration of a theorem. If one ſtep is left out, one link in the chain of ideas conſtituting a demonſtration is omitted, the concluſion will be deſtroyed ;

ſtroyed; but a fact may be eſtabliſhed, notwithſtanding a diſagreement of the witneſſes in certain trifling particulars of their evidence reſpecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible propoſition to the genealogies of Chriſt given by Matthew and Luke—there is a diſagreement between them; therefore, you ſay, "If Matthew ſpeak truth, Luke ſpeaks falſehood; and if Luke ſpeak truth, Matthew ſpeaks falſehood; and thence there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very firſt thing they ſay and ſet out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they ſay afterwards." I cannot admit either your premiſes or your concluſion—not your concluſion; becauſe two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thouſand years, cannot, on that account, be eſteemed incompetent to bear teſtimony to the tranſactions of his life, unleſs an intention to falſify could be proved againſt them. If two Welſh hiſtorians ſhould at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and ſhould, through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up the pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they, on account of that difference, be diſcredited in every thing they ſaid? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different inſtruments, but without the leaſt intention to write a falſehood?—I cannot admit your premiſes; becauſe Matthew ſpeaks truth, and Luke ſpeaks truth, though they do not ſpeak the ſame truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joſeph the reputed father of Jeſus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary the real mother of Jeſus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it ſufficient to ſay, that the authors had no deſign to deceive the reader,

reader, that they took their accounts from the public regiſters, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of theſe genealogies, they would have been expoſed at the time to inſtant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impoſe a falſe genealogy on the jewiſh nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of theſe genealogies, you make the following calculation:—"From the birth of David to the birth of Chriſt is upwards of 1080 years; and as there were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each perſon mentioned in St. Matthew's liſt at the time his firſt ſon was born, it is only neceſſary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each parſon. As the life time of man was then but of the ſame extent it is now, it is an abſurdity to ſuppoſe, that 27 generations ſhould all be old bachelors, before they married. So far from this genealogy being a ſolemn truth, it is not even a reaſonable lie."—This argument aſſumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the concluſion is in a ſtyle which even its truth would not excuſe:—yet the argument is good for nothing, and the concluſion is not true. You have read the Bible with ſome attention; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and abſurdities; read it over again, eſpecially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical liſt of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joaſh, Joaſh of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias.—I inquire not, in this place, whence this omiſſion proceeded; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangeliſt; ſtill it is an omiſſion. Now if you will add theſe three generations to the 27 you mention,

mention, and divide 1080 by 30, you will find the average age when theſe jews had each of them their firſt ſon born was 36. They married ſooner than they ought to have done, according to Ariſtotle, who fixes thirty-ſeven as the moſt proper age, when a man ſhould marry. Nor was it neceſſary that they ſhould have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a ſon to ſucceed him till he was thirty-ſix; they might have been married at twenty, without having a ſon till they were forty. You aſſume in your argument that the firſt born ſon ſucceeded the father in the liſt—this is not true. Solomon ſucceeded David; yet David had at leaſt ſix ſons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had at leaſt three ſons before he had Abia (Abijah) who ſucceeded him.—It is needleſs to cite more inſtances to this purpoſe; but from theſe, and other circumſtances which might be inſiſted upon, I can ſee no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jeſus Chriſt, mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a ſolemn truth.

You inſiſt much upon ſome things being mentioned by one evangeliſt, which are not mentioned by all or by any of the others; and you take this to be a reaſon why we ſhould conſider the goſpels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of ſome *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this ſuppoſition; but I may be allowed to uſe it as an argument againſt yourſelf—it removes every poſſible ſuſpicion of fraud and impoſture, and confirms the goſpel hiſtory in the ſtrongeſt manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jeſus; from whatever ſource they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the laſt importance; ſuch as the purity of his manners; the ſanctity of his doctrines; the

multitude

multitude and publicity of his miracles; the perſecuting ſpirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his reſurrection; and whilſt they agree in theſe great points, their diſagreement in points of little conſequence, is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falſehood, of their ſeveral accounts.—Had they agreed in nothing, their teſtimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been ſuſpected that, inſtead of unconnected individuals, they were a ſet of impoſtors. The manner, in which the evangeliſts have recorded the particulars of the life of Jeſus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our higheſt aſſent to its truth; notwithſtanding the force of your incontrovertible propoſition.

As an inſtance of contradiction between the evangeliſts, you tell us, that Matthew ſays, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joſeph; but Luke ſays, he appeared unto Mary.—The angel, Sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that ſhe ſhould, by the power of God, conceive a ſon; to Joſeph, ſome months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was viſible; in the interim ſhe had paid a viſit of three months to her couſin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded theſe obviouſly-diſtinct appearances; but men, even of candour, are liable to miſtakes. Who, you aſk, would now believe a girl, who ſhould ſay ſhe was gotten with-child by a ghoſt? —Who, but yourſelf, would ever have aſked a queſtion ſo abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this ſubject.—You will never perſuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any reſemblance to the ſtage ghoſts in Hamlet or Macbeth,

Macbeth, from which you ſeem to have derived your idea of it.

The ſtory of the maſſacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew ; and therefore you think it is a lie. We muſt give up all hiſtory if we refuſe to admit facts recorded by only one hiſtorian. Matthew addreſſed his goſpel to the jews, and put them in mind of a circumſtance, of which they muſt have had a melancholy remembrance ; but gentile converts were leſs intereſted in that event. The evangeliſts were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jeſus ; it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an inſtance of his cruelty, which was not eſſentially connected with their ſubject. The maſſacre, however, was probably known even at Rome ; and it was certainly correſpondent to the character of Herod. John, you ſay, at the time of the maſſacre, " was under two years of age, and yet he eſcaped ; ſo that the ſtory circumſtantially belies itſelf."—John was ſix months older than Jeſus ; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended ; it probably reached no farther than to thoſe who had completed their firſt year, without including thoſe who had entered upon their ſecond : but without inſiſting upon this, ſtill I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the maſſacre ; and I could give many probable reaſons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of anſwering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangeliſts, you obſerve, agree in reciting, *exactly in the ſame words*, the written inſcription which was put over Chriſt when he was crucified.—I admit that there is an uneſſential verbal difference ;

difference; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inſcriptions themſelves?—One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and, though they had all the ſame meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had tranſlated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their tranſlations. You have rendered yourſelf famous by writing a book called—The Rights of Man:—had you been guillotined by Robeſpierre, with this title, written in French, Engliſh, and German, and affixed to the guillotine—Thomas Paine, of America, author of The Rights of Man—and had four perſons, ſome of whom had ſeen the execution, and the reſt had heard of it from eye-witneſſes, written ſhort accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had ſaid the inſcription was—This is Thomas Paine, the author of The Rights of Man—another, The author of The Rights of Man—a third, This is the author of The Rights of Man—and a fourth, Thomas Paine, of America, the author of The Rights of Man—would any man of common ſenſe have doubted, on account of this diſagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life?—"The only one," you tell us, "of the men called apoſtles, who appears to have been near the ſpot where Jeſus was crucified, was Peter."—This your aſſertion is not true—we do not know that Peter was preſent at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the diſciple whom Jeſus loved, was preſent; for Jeſus ſpoke to him from the croſs.—You go on, "But why ſhould we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in ſwearing that he knew not Jeſus?" I will tell you why—becauſe Peter ſincerely repented of the wickedneſs into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and ſuffered martyrdom in atteſtation of the truth of the chriſtian religion.

But

But the evangeliſts diſagree, you ſay, not only as to the ſuperſcription on the croſs, but as to the time of the crucifixion, " Mark ſaying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning), and John at the ſixth hour (twelve, as you ſuppoſe, at noon." Various ſolutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which ſatisfied Doctor Middleton, much leſs can it be expected that any of them ſhould ſatisfy you; but there is a ſolution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquieſced—That John, writing his goſpel in Aſia, uſed the Roman method of computing time; which was the ſame as our own; ſo that by the ſixth hour, when Jeſus was *condemned*, we are to underſtand ſix o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from ſix to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty ſhould be ſtill eſteemed inſuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain ſo; and if it ſhould, the main point, the crucifixion of Jeſus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking ſome circumſtances attending the crucifixion, which are ſo natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the diſciples of Jeſus, John was beloved by him with a particular degree of affection; and, as kindneſs produces kindneſs, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom ſhould we expect to be the attendants of Jeſus in his laſt ſuffering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart?—Whom but his mother, whoſe ſoul was now pierced through by the ſword of ſorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold?—Whom but thoſe, who had been attached to him through life; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to miniſter to him of their ſubſtance, to be attentive to all his wants?—Theſe were the perſons whom we ſhould have expected to attend his execution; and theſe were there.

To

To whom would an expiring ſon, of the beſt affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmeſt friend?—And this did Jeſus.—Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her ſorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and miſery, he ſaid to his beloved diſciple—"Behold thy mother! and from that hour that diſciple took her to his own home." I own to you, that ſuch inſtances as theſe, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the ſimplicity and truth of the goſpels; and far outweigh a thouſand little objections, ariſing from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumſtances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means uſed by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions ſeveral miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion—the darkneſs which overſpread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the reſurrection of many ſaints, and their going into the holy city.—"Such," you ſay, "is the account which this daſhing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not ſupported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expreſſed; Matthew is ſupported by Mark and Luke, with reſpect to two of the miracles—the darkneſs—and the rending of the veil:—and their omiſſion of the others does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or diſbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to ſay poſitively what influenced them to mention only two miracles; they probably thought them ſufficient to convince any perſon, as they convinced the centurion, that Jeſus "was a righteous man"—"the Son of God." And theſe two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongſt the perſons for whoſe

whoſe benefit Mark and Luke wrote their goſpels, than either the earthquake or the reſurrection of the ſaints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular ſpot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and thoſe to whom the ſaints appeared might, at the time of writing the goſpels of Mark and Luke, have been dead: but the darkneſs muſt have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might ſtill be preſerved at the time theſe authors wrote.—As to John not mentioning any of theſe miracles—it is well known that his goſpel was written as a kind of ſupplement to the other goſpels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangeliſts had related, and he has added ſeveral things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumſtance of great importance; he tells us that he ſaw one of the ſoldiers pierce the ſide of Jeſus with a ſpear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and leſt any one ſhould doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangeliſts, he aſſerts it with peculiar earneſtneſs—" And he that ſaw it, bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he ſaith true, that ye might believe." —John ſaw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is eaſily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomiſts tell us—that it came from the *pericardium*:—ſo conſiſtent is evangelical teſtimony with the moſt curious reſearches into natural ſcience!—You amuſe yourſelf with the account of what the ſcripture calls *many* ſaints, and you call an *army* of ſaints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them.—It is very poſſible that Matthew might have known the fact of their reſurrection, without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curioſity in every particular,

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I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curioſity on the ſubject; it is enough for me to know that "Chriſt was the firſt fruits of them that ſlept," and "that all that are in the graves ſhall hear his voice and ſhall come forth," as thoſe holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his reſurrection, and paſſed from death to life. If I durſt indulge myſelf in being wiſe above what is written, I might be able to anſwer many of your inquiries relative to thoſe ſaints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not ſupport the authority of ſcripture by the boldneſs of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the ſilence of the other evangeliſts, and of St. Paul alſo, on this ſubject, yet there is a greater difficulty in ſuppoſing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no ſupernatural darkneſs, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no reſurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many—if none of theſe things had been true, or rather if any one of them had been falſe, what motive could Matthew, writing to the jews, have had for trumping up ſuch wonderful ſtories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every jew he met would have ſtared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impoſtor. What author, who twenty years hence ſhould addreſs to the French nation an hiſtory of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkneſs for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were ſplit? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many perſons in Paris?—It is quite impoſſible to ſuppoſe, that any one would dare to publiſh

liſh ſuch obvious lies; and I think it equally impoſſible to ſuppoſe, that Matthew would have dared to publiſh his account of what happened at the death of Jeſus, had not that account been generally known to be true.

LETTER VIII.

THE "tale of the reſurrection," you ſay, "follows that of the crucifixion."—You have accuſtomed me ſo much to this kind of language, that when I find you ſpeaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent diſagreement in the accounts, which the evangeliſts have given of ſome circumſtances reſpecting the reſurrection, you remark—"If the writers of theſe books had gone into any court of juſtice to prove an *alibi*, (for it is the nature of an alibi that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the abſence of a dead body by ſupernatural means,) and had given their evidence in the ſame contradictory manner, as it is here given; they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have juſtly deſerved it"—"hard words, or hanging," it ſeems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the reſurrection is given by all the evangeliſts, which has occaſioned the ſeeming confuſion; and that this confuſion would have been cleared up at

once, if the witneſſes of the reſurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *vivâ voce* examination of all the witneſſes, let us call up and queſtion the evangeliſts as witneſſes to a ſupernatural alibi.—Did you find the ſepulchre of Jeſus empty? One of us actually ſaw it empty, and the reſt heard, from eye-witneſſes, that it was empty.—Did you, or any of the followers of Jeſus, take away the dead body from the ſepulchre? All anſwer, No.—Did the ſoldiers, or the jews, take away the body? No.—How are you certain of that? Becauſe we ſaw the body when dead, and we ſaw it afterwards when it was alive.—How do you know that what you ſaw was the body of Jeſus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jeſus, and knew his perſon perfectly.—Were you not affrighted, and miſtook a ſpirit for a body? No; the body had fleſh and bones; we are ſure that it was the very body which hung upon the croſs, for we ſaw the wound in the ſide, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet.—And all this you are ready to ſwear? We are; and we are ready to die alſo, ſooner than we will deny any part of it.—This is the teſtimony which all the evangeliſts would give, in whatever court of juſtice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would ſufficiently eſtabliſh the alibi of the dead body from the ſepulchre by ſupernatural means.

But as the reſurrection of Jeſus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deſerving of this notice, but they ſhall have it. The book of Matthew, you ſay, "ſtates that when Chriſt was put in the ſepulchre, the jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the ſepulchre, to prevent the body being ſtolen by the diſciples."—I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account; you have omitted

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the reaſon for the requeſt which the chief prieſts made to Pilate—" Sir, we remember that that deceiver ſaid, while he was yet alive, after three days I will riſe again."—It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jeſus predicted his reſurrection, he predicted alſo his crucifixion, and all that he ſhould ſuffer from the malice of thoſe very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard.—" He ſhewed to his diſciples, how that he muſt go unto Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the elders, and chief prieſts, and ſcribes, and be killed, and be raiſed again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21) Theſe men knew full well that the firſt part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and, inſtead of repenting of what they had done, they were ſo infatuated as to ſuppoſe, that by a guard of ſoldiers they could prevent the completion of the ſecond.—The other books, you obſerve, " ſay nothing about this application, nor about the ſealing of the ſtone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to theſe accounts there were none."—This, Sir, I deny. The other books do not ſay that there were none of theſe things; how often muſt I repeat, that omiſſions are not contradictions, nor ſilence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on—" The book of Matthew continues its account that at the end of the ſabbath, as it began to *dawn*, towards the firſt day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to ſee the ſepulchre. Mark ſays it was ſun-riſing, and John ſays it was dark. Luke ſays it was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and *Mary the mother of James*, and *other women*, that came to the ſepulchre. And John ſays that Mary Magdalene came alone. So well do they agree about their firſt evidence! they all appear, however, to have known moſt about Mary Magdalene; ſhe was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that ſhe

might be upon the ſtroll."—This is a long paragraph ; I will anſwer it diſtinctly :—firſt, there is no diſagreement of evidence with reſpect to the time when the women went to the ſepulchre ; all the evangeliſts agree as to the day on which they went ; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning ; what court of Juſtice in the world would ſet aſide this evidence, as inſufficient to ſubſtantiate the fact of the womens' having gone to the ſepulchre, becauſe the witneſſes differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no diſagreement of evidence with reſpect to the perſons who went to the ſepulchre. John ſtates that Mary Magdalene went to the ſepulchre ; but he does not ſtate, *as you make him ſtate*, that Mary Magdalene went alone; ſhe might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke :—is it an unuſual thing to diſtinguiſh by name a principal perſon going on a viſit, or an embaſſy, without mentioning his ſubordinate attendants ? Thirdly, in oppoſition to your inſinuation that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wiſh it to be conſidered, whether there is any ſcriptural authority for that imputation ; and whether there be or not, I muſt contend, that a repentant and reformed woman, ought not to be eſteemed an improper witneſs of a fact. The conjecture, which you adopt concerning her, is nothing leſs than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excuſable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in your's.

The book of Matthew, you obſerve, goes on to ſay—" And behold, there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord deſcended from heaven, and came and rolled back the ſtone from the door, and *ſat upon it* :—but the other books ſay nothing about any earthquake,"—what then ? does their ſilence

ſilence prove that there was none?—" nor about the angel rolling back the ſtone and ſitting upon it; —what then? does their ſilence prove that the ſtone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not ſit upon it?—" and according to their accounts there was no angel ſitting there." This concluſion I muſt deny; their accounts do not ſay there was no angel ſitting there, at the time that Matthew ſays he ſat upon the ſtone. They do not deny the fact, they ſimply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the ſepulchre, found the ſtone rolled away: hence it is evident that the ſtone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the ſepulchre; and the other evangeliſts, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the ſepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a tranſaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What ſpace of time intervened between the rolling away the ſtone, and the arrival of the women at the ſepulchre, is no where mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his poſition; from ſitting on the outſide he might have entered into the ſepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance, or, from the firſt, there might have been two, one on the outſide rolling away the ſtone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, " ſays there were two, and they were both ſtanding; and John ſays there were two, and both ſitting."—It is impoſſible, I grant, even for an angel to be ſitting and ſtanding at the ſame inſtant of time; but Luke and John do not ſpeak of the ſame inſtant, nor of the ſame appearance—Luke ſpeaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the ſepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on ſtill

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minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this miſtake—that the angels were ſeen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the ſame individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's uſing the expreſſion *unto this day*, "that the book muſt have been manufactured after a lapſe of ſome generations at leaſt," it cannot be admitted againſt the poſitive teſtimony of all antiquity. That the ſtory about ſtealing away the body was a bungling ſtory, I readily admit; but the chief prieſts are anſwerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice, or mine, except as it is a ſtrong inſtance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudice may miſlead the underſtanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in thoſe books that reſpects, you ſay, "the pretended appearances of Chriſt after his pretended reſurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was ſitting on the ſtone at the mouth of the ſepulchre, ſaid to the two Marys, (chap. xxviii. 7.) "Behold, Chriſt is gone before you into Galilee, there ſhall you ſee him." The goſpel, Sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men: and it is the duty of prieſts to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them againſt the errors of miſtaken, or the deſigns of wicked men. You then, who can read your Bible, turn to this paſſage. and you will find that the angel did not ſay, "Behold, Chriſt *is gone* before you into Galilee,"—but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made uſe of in this quotation, none that I have ſeen render the original word by—he is gone:—it might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phraſe does not imply an immediate ſetting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to ſay, he is

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going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at ſome diſtance. Even your daſhing Matthew could not be guilty of ſuch a blunder as to make the angel ſay *he is gone*; for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the ſepulchre to tell his diſciples what the angels had ſaid to them, Jeſus himſelf met them. Now how Jeſus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jeruſalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuſe your introducing the expreſſion—"then the eleven diſciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Teſtament, you would not have found in this place any word anſwering to *then*; the paſſage is better tranſlated—and the eleven. Chriſt had ſaid to his diſciples, (Matt. xxvi. 32.) "After I am riſen again, I will go before you into Galilee:"—and the angel put the women in mind of the very expreſſion and prediction—*he is riſen, as he ſaid; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee.* Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witneſſes in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and, by this omiſſion, ſeems to connect the day of the reſurrection of Jeſus, with that of the departure of the diſciples for Galilee. You ſeem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of ſolution; for you ſay—"It is not poſſible, unleſs we admit theſe diſciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of theſe books could be any of the eleven perſons called diſciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jeſus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the ſame day that he is ſaid to have riſen, Luke and John muſt have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke ſays expreſsly, and John implies as much, that the meeting

was that ſame day in a houſe at Jeruſalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were aſſembled in a houſe at Jeruſalem, Matthew muſt have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew ſays, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and conſequently the evidence given in thoſe books deſtroys each other." When I was a young man in the univerſity, I was pretty much accuſtomed to drawing of conſequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not ſuffer me to draw conſequences after your manner; ſhe taught me—that a falſe poſition muſt end in an abſurd concluſion. I have ſhewn your poſition—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the reſurrection—to be falſe, and hence your conſequence—that the evidence given in theſe two books deſtroys each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have conſidered, that the feaſt of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the paſſover was eaten, laſted ſeven days; and that ſtrict obſervers of the law did not think themſelves at liberty to leave Jeruſalem, till that feaſt was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the diſciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the reſurrection.

You certainly have read the New Teſtament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apoſtles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you ſpeak of him as an eye-witneſs of the things he relates; you ought to have known that Luke was no apoſtle; and he tells you himſelf, in the preface to his goſpel, that he wrote from the teſtimony of others. If this miſtake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit perſon to write comments on the Bible; if from deſign, (which I am unwilling to ſuſpect,) you are ſtill leſs fit; in either caſe it may ſuggeſt to your readers the propriety of ſuſpecting the truth and accuracy of your

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aſſertions, however daring and intemperate.—" Of the numerous prieſts or parſons of the preſent day, biſhops and all, the ſum total of whoſe learning," according to you, " is a b ab, and hic, hæc, hoc, there is not one amongſt them," you ſay, " who can write poetry like Homer, or ſcience like Euclid." —If I ſhould admit this, (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who underſtand theſe authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one amongſt them, biſhops and all, ſo ignorant as to rank Luke the evangeliſt among the apoſtles of Chriſt. I will not preſs this point; any man may fall into a miſtake, and the conſciouſneſs of this fallibility ſhould create in all men a little modeſty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they preſume to call the moſt illuſtrious characters of antiquity liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jeſus did not ſhew himſelf to all the people after his reſurrection.—This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may ſound well enough in the mouth of a jew, wiſhing to excuſe the infidelity of his countrymen: but it is not judiciouſly adopted by deiſts of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the uſe of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them: he gave the jews opportunities of ſeeing the miracles of Jeſus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who perſevered in their incredulity after the reſurrection of Lazarus, would have perſevered alſo after the reſurrection of Jeſus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jeſus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jeſus ſaw no corruption; why ſhould you expect, that they would have believed in Jeſus on his own reſurrection, when they had not believed in him on the reſurrection of Lazarus? When the phariſees were told of the reſurrection

ſurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief prieſts, gathered a council, and ſaid—"What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him:—then from that day forth they took counſel together to put him to death." The great men at Jeruſalem, you ſee admitted that Jeſus had raiſed Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jeſus was the Chriſt; it only exaſperated their malice, and accelerated their purpoſe of deſtroying him. Had Jeſus ſhewn himſelf after his reſurrection, the chief prieſts would probably have gathered another council, have opened it with, What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the reſurrection of Jeſus, which we have in the New Teſtament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he ſhewed himſelf to every man in Jeruſalem; for then we ſhould have had a ſuſpicion, that the whole ſtory had been fabricated by the jews.

You think Paul an improper witneſs of the reſurrection; I think him one of the fitteſt that could have been choſen; and for this reaſon—his teſtimony is the teſtimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous converſion, ſufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, conſidered as a fable. For the truth of the reſurrection of Jeſus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witneſſes; and before whom does he make this appeal?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blaſt his character, if he had advanced an untruth.—You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had reſided at Corinth near two years; during a part of that time, he had teſtified to the jews, that Jeſus was the Chriſt; that, finding the bulk of that nation obſtinate in their unbelief, he had

had turned to the gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Chriſt; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the goſpel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who after his departure had been ſplit into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in oppoſition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumſtance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of jews; theſe men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he aſſerts, "that Jeſus Chriſt was buried; that he roſe again the third day; that he was ſeen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards ſeen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive." An appeal to above 250 living witneſſes, is a pretty ſtrong proof of a fact; but it becomes irreſiſtible, when that appeal is ſubmitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you muſt allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying raſcal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any ſuch thing; and, therefore, we may ſafely conclude, that this teſtimony of Paul to the reſurrection of Jeſus was true: and it is a teſtimony, in my opinion, of the greateſt weight.

You come, you ſay, to the laſt ſcene, the aſcenſion; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future miſſion of the diſciples was to reſt for proof."—I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future miſſion of the apoſtles might have been proved, though Jeſus Chriſt had not viſibly aſcended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine miſſion; and when Jeſus gave the apoſtles a commiſſion to preach the goſpel, he

he commanded them to ſtay at Jeruſalem, till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the aſcenſion; and John, you ſay, has not ſaid a ſyllable about it. I think otherwiſe. John has not given an expreſs account of the aſcenſion, but has certainly ſaid ſomething about it; for he informs us, that Jeſus ſaid to Mary—"Touch me not: for I am not yet *aſcended* to my father: but go to my brethren, and ſay unto them, I *aſcend* unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God." This is ſurely ſaying ſomething about the aſcenſion; and if the fact of the aſcenſion be not related by John or Matthew, it may reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that the omiſſion was made, on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be juſtly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the jews, a very few days after it had happened—"This Jeſus hath God raiſed up, whereof we all are witneſſes. Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted.—Paul bears teſtimony alſo to the aſcenſion, when he ſays, that Jeſus was *received up into glory*. As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the aſcenſion, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exiſt; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jeſus going with his apoſtles to Bethany, and bleſſing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omiſſions, I muſt often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you ſay, "gone through the examination of the four books aſcribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is conſidered that the whole ſpace of time, from the crucifixion, to what is called the aſcenſion, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumſtances are reported to have happened near the ſame ſpot, Jeruſalem, it is, I believe, impoſſible to find, in any ſtory upon record, ſo many,

and

and ſuch glaring abſurdities, contradictions, and falſehoods, as are in thoſe books."—What am I to ſay to this? Am I to ſay that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honeſt man? Or, admitting your honeſty, am I to ſay that you are groſsly ignorant of the ſubject? Let the reader judge.—John ſays, that Jeſus appeared to his diſciples at Jeruſalem on the day of his reſurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. —The ſame John ſays, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. —Now, Sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be conſiſtent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's teſtimony, either with reſpect to *place* or *time*—for he ſays—After theſe things (after the two appearances to the diſciples at Jeruſalem on the firſt and on the eighth day after the reſurrection) Jeſus ſhewed himſelf again to his diſciples at the ſea of *Tiberias*. The ſea of Tiberias, I preſume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was ſixty or ſeventy miles from Jeruſalem; it muſt have taken the diſciples ſome time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jeruſalem into Galilee. What, in your own inſulting language to the prieſts, what have you to anſwer, as to the *ſame ſpot Jeruſalem*, as to your apparently *three or four days*?—But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his goſpel, and ſays—"Chriſt ſhewed himſelf alive after his paſſion, by many infallible proofs, being ſeen of the apoſtles forty days, and ſpeaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:"—inſtead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the aſcenſion. I need not, I truſt, after this, trouble myſelf about the falſehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangeliſts; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your aſſertions, however bold and improper.

improper. You will ſuffer me to remark, that the evangeliſts were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conſcious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable ſimplicity. They ſeem to have ſaid to the jews of their time, and to ſay to the jews and unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to ſay.—Had they been impoſtors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I conſider as a proof of their honeſty and veracity.

John the baptiſt had given his teſtimony to the truth of our Saviour's miſſion in the moſt unequivocal terms; he afterwards ſent two of his diſciples to Jeſus, to aſk him whether he was really the expected Meſſiah or not. Matthew relates *both* theſe circumſtances: had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impoſtor, would he have invalidated John's teſtimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impoſſible! Matthew, having proved the reſurrection of Jeſus, tells us, that the eleven diſciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jeſus had appointed them, and "when they ſaw him, they worſhipped him: but ſome doubted."—Would an impoſtor, in the very laſt place where he mentions the reſurrection, and in the concluſion of his book, have ſuggeſted ſuch a cavil to unbelievers, as to ſay—ſome doubted? Impoſſible! The evangeliſt has left us to collect the reaſon why ſome doubted:—the diſciples ſaw Jeſus, at a diſtance, on the mountain; and ſome of them fell down and worſhipped him; whilſt others doubted whether the perſon they ſaw was really Jeſus; their doubt, however, could not have laſted long, for in the very next verſe we are told, that Jeſus came and ſpake unto them.

Great

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the ſeveral accounts given us by the evangeliſts of the reſurrection. It does not ſeem to me to be a matter of any great conſequence to chriſtianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; ſince there is no ſuch diſcordance in them, as to render the fact of the reſurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of juſtice, ſhould give poſitive evidence of a fact; and three others ſhould afterwards be examined, and all of them ſhould confirm the evidence of the firſt as to the fact, but ſhould apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or leſs particular in their accounts of the circumſtances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, becauſe we could not harmonize the evidence reſpecting the circumſtances relating to it? The omiſſion of any one circumſtance (ſuch as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the ſepulchre; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the ſtone from the ſepulchre, entered into the ſepulchre) may render an harmony impoſſible, without having recourſe to ſuppoſition to ſupply the defect. You deiſts laugh at all ſuch attempts, and call them prieſtcraft. I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcileable difference between the accounts reſpecting the life of Jeſus, or his reſurrection.—Be it ſo; what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, deſtroy the credibility of the goſpel hiſtory in any of its eſſential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general anſwer to moſt of your deiſtical objections, I profeſs my ſincerity, in ſaying, that I conſider it as a true and ſufficient anſwer; and I leave it to your conſideration. I have, purpoſely, in the whole of this diſcuſſion, been ſilent as to the

inſpiration of the evangeliſts; well knowing that you would have rejected, with ſcorn, any thing I could have ſaid on that point: but, in diſputing with a deiſt, I do moſt ſolemnly contend, that the chriſtian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptation, whether the evangeliſts were inſpired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wiſh to conceal their ſentiments; they have a decent reſpect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil ſociety. Some few have been more daring, but leſs judicious; and have, without diſguiſe, profeſſed their unbelief. But you are the firſt who ever ſwore that he was an infidel, concluding your deiſtical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influence of his holy ſpirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he ſent into the world, that all who believe in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life.

You ſwear, that you think the chriſtian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion. —It proves the ſincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithſtanding the oath, may be either true or falſe. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St. Paul, when he ſwears to the Galatians, that in what he told them of his miraculous converſion, he did not tell a lie: "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not:"—do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you, do but conſider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I ſhall not deſpair of your becoming a chriſtian.

Deiſm,

Deiſm, you ſay, conſiſts in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you reſt all your hopes.—There is nothing in deiſm but what is in chriſtianity, but there is much in chriſtianity which is not in deiſm. The chriſtian has no doubt concerning a future ſtate; every deiſt, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this ſubject overwhelmed with doubts inſuperable by human reaſon. The chriſtian has no miſgivings as to the pardon of penitent ſinners, through the interceſſion of a mediator; the deiſt is haraſſed with apprehenſion leſt the moral juſtice of God ſhould demand, with inexorable rigour, puniſhment for tranſgreſſion. The chriſtian has no doubt concerning the lawfulneſs and the efficacy of prayer; the deiſt is diſturbed on this point by abſtract conſiderations concerning the goodneſs of God, which wants not to be intreated; concerning his foreſight, which has no need of our information; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our ſupplication. The chriſtian admits the providence of God and the liberty of human actions; the deiſt is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The chriſtian has aſſurance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities; the deiſt does not deny the poſſibility that God may have acceſs to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the underſtanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

LETTER IX.

"THOSE," you ſay, "who are not much acquainted with eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, may ſuppoſe that the book called the New Teſtament has exiſted ever ſince the time of Jeſus Chriſt, but the fact is hiſtorically otherwiſe; there was no ſuch book as the New Teſtament till more than three hundred years after the time that Chriſt is ſaid to have lived."—This paragraph is calculated to miſlead common readers; it is neceſſary to unfold its meaning. The book, called the New Teſtament, conſiſts of twenty-ſeven different parts; concerning ſeven of theſe, viz. the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, that of James, the ſecond of Peter, the ſecond of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at firſt ſome doubts; and the queſtion, whether they ſhould be received into the canon, might be decided, as all queſtions concerning opinions muſt be, by vote. With reſpect to the other twenty parts, thoſe who are moſt acquainted with eccleſiaſtical hiſtory will tell you, as Du Pin does after Euſebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all chriſtians.—Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a ſettled point; all the books of the New Teſtament, except the Revelation, are enumerated as canonical in the Conſtitutions of that council; but it is a great miſtake to ſuppoſe, that the greateſt part of the books of the New Teſtament were not in *general uſe* amongſt chriſtians, long before the council

cil of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the ſubject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with eccleſiaſtical hiſtory than I am, and, probably, than you are,—*Moſheim.* "The opinions," ſays this author, "or rather the conjectures, of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Teſtament were collected into one volume, as alſo about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important queſtion is attended with great and almoſt inſuperable difficulties to us in theſe latter times. It is however ſufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the ſecond century, the greateſt part of the books of the New Teſtament were read in every chriſtian ſociety throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that theſe ſacred writings were carefully ſeparated from ſeveral human compoſitions upon the ſame ſubject, either by ſome of the apoſtles themſelves, who lived ſo long, or by their diſciples and ſucceſſors, who were ſpread abroad through all nations. We are well aſſured, that the *four goſpels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three firſt received the approbation of this divine apoſtle. And why may we not ſuppoſe, that the other books of the New Teſtament were gathered together at the ſame time? What renders this highly probable is, that the moſt urgent neceſſity required its being done. For, not long after Chriſt's aſcenſion into heaven, ſeveral hiſtories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds, and fabulous wonders, were compoſed by perſons, whoſe intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whoſe writings diſcovered the greateſt ſuperſtition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were impoſed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apoſtles. Theſe apocryphal and ſpurious writings muſt have produced a ſad con-

fuſion, and rendered both the hiſtory and the doctrine of Chriſt uncertain, had not the rulers of the church uſed all poſſible care and diligence in ſeparating the books that were truly apoſtolical and divine, from all that ſpurious traſh, and conveying them down to poſterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the chriſtians, which Juſtin Martyr preſented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the ſenate, and people of Rome? I ſhould ſooner expect a falſity in a petition, which any body of perſecuted men, imploring juſtice, ſhould preſent to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this apology.—Yet in this apology, which was preſented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four goſpels are quoted*, but it is expreſsly ſaid, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public aſſemblies of the chriſtians. I forbear purſuing this matter farther; elſe it might eaſily be ſhewn, that probably the goſpels, and certainly ſome of St. Paul's epiſtles, were known to *Clement*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apoſtles. Theſe men could not quote or refer to books which did not exiſt: and therefore though you could make it out that the book called the New Teſtament did not formally exiſt under that title, till 350 years after Chriſt; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books, of which it is compoſed, were written, and moſt of them received by all chriſtians, within a few years after his death

You raiſe a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and reſurrection of Jeſus, who had ſaid, that the Son of man ſhall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. —Are you ignorant then that the jews uſed the phraſe three days and three nights to denote what we underſtand by three days?—It is ſaid in Geneſis, chap. vii. 12. "The rain was upon the earth forty days

days and forty nights; and this is equivalent tothe expreſſion, (ver. 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Inſtead then of ſaying three days and three nights, let us ſimply ſay—and you will not object to Chriſt's being three days Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the heart of the earth. I do not ſay that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred inſtances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is ſpoken of as the whole.—Thus much for the defence of the hiſtorical part of the New Teſtament.

You have introduced an account of *Fauſtus*, as denying the genuineneſs of the Books of the Old Teſtament. Will you permit that great ſcholar in ſacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you ſomething about this Fauſtus?—"He was ignorant, as were moſt of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Teſtament merely through the channel of the Latin tranſlation: he was not only devoid of a ſufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the higheſt degree. An argument which he brings againſt the genuineneſs of the goſpel affords ſufficient ground for this aſſertion; for he contends, that the goſpel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himſelf, becauſe he is always mentioned in the third perſon." You know who has argued like Fauſtus, but I did not think myſelf authorized on that account to call you illiterate in the higheſt degree; but Michaelis makes a ſtill more ſevere concluſion concerning Fauſtus; and he extends his obſervation to every man who argued like him—"A man capable of ſuch an argument muſt have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Fauſtus, but even of the Commentaries of Cæſar. And were it thought improbable that ſo heavy a charge could be laid with

with juſtice on the ſide of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the ſide of his honeſty, and induce us to ſuppoſe, that, preferring the arts of ſophiſtry to the plainneſs of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be falſe." (Marſh's Tranſl.) Never more, I think, ſhall we hear of Moſes not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third perſon.

Not being able to produce any argument to render queſtionable either the genuineneſs or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epiſtles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, ſince the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witneſs to any of the ſcenes told of the reſurrection and aſcenſion, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had ſo far reſiſted the evidence which the apoſtles had given of the reſurrection and aſcenſion of Jeſus, as to be a perſecutor of the diſciples of Chriſt, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high prieſt and the ſenate of the children of Iſrael did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apoſtles; they did not contradict their teſtimony concerning the reſurrection and the aſcenſion; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counſel to put the apoſtles to death; and this was alſo the temper of Paul; whether he believed or did not believe the ſtory of the reſurrection, he was exceedingly mad againſt the ſaints. The writer of Paul's Epiſtles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it:—"I certify you, brethren, that the goſpel, which was preached of me is not after man.

man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt." Paul does not pretend to have been a witneſs of the *ſtory* of the reſurrection, but he does much more; he aſſerts, that he was himſelf a witneſs of the reſurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jeſus to his diſciples, Paul ſays of himſelf, "Laſt of all, he was ſeen of me alſo, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witneſs or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been *a* witneſs of the reſurrection.

The ſtory of his being ſtruck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damaſcus, has nothing in it, you ſay, miraculous or extraordinary: you repreſent him as ſtruck by lightning.—It is ſomewhat extraordinary for a man, who is ſtruck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full poſſeſſion of his underſtanding; to hear a voice iſſuing from the lightning, ſpeaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into converſation with him. His companions, you ſay, appear not to have ſuffered in the ſame manner:—the greater the wonder. If it was a common ſtorm of thunder and lightning which ſtruck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is ſomewhat extraordinary that he alone ſhould be hurt; and that, notwithſtanding his being ſtruck blind by lightning, he ſhould in other reſpects be ſo little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damaſcus. So difficult is it to oppoſe truth by an hypotheſis!—In the character of Paul you diſcover a great deal of violence and fanaticiſm; and ſuch men, you obſerve, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach. —Read, Sir, Lord *Lyttleton*'s obſervations on the converſion and apoſtleſhip of St. Paul; and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expreſſes his opinion on this ſubject—

ject—" Beſides all the proofs of the chriſtian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, from the neceſſary connection it has with the whole ſyſtem of the jewiſh religion, from the miracles of Chriſt, and from the evidence given of his reſurrection by all the other apoſtles, I think the converſion and apoſtleſhip of St. Paul alone, duly conſidered, is, of itſelf, a demonſtration ſufficient to prove chriſtianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have ſome weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a ſtupid evangeliſt, or of an a b ab prieſt,—but of a learned layman, whoſe illuſtrious rank received ſplendor from his talents.

You are diſpleaſed with St. Paul " for ſetting out to prove the reſurrection of the *ſame* body "—You know, I preſume, that the reſurrection of the ſame body is not, by all, admitted to be a ſcriptural doctrine.—" In the New Teſtament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the chriſtian faith) I find our Saviour and the apoſtles to preach *the reſurrection of the dead*, and the *reſurrection from the dead*, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the reſurrection of the ſame body is ſo much as mentioned." This obſervation of Mr. Locke I ſo far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he ſets out to prove the reſurrection of the ſame body. I do not queſtion the poſſibility of the reſurrection of the ſame body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which ſome learned men have explained it; (ſomewhat after the way of your vegetative ſpeck in the kernel of a peach;) but as you are diſcrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to ſhew that what you attempt to diſcredit *is* the doctrine of the apoſtle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body,—" your natural body will be raiſed a ſpiritual body,"

your

your corruptible will put on incorruption. You are ſo much out of humour with your preſent body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in ſomething. Now I had always thought, that the ſingle circumſtance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite ſuperiority not only over inſects, fiſhes, ſnails, and ſpiders, (which you repreſent as excelling us in loco-motive powers,) but over all the animals of the creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, deſcribing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you ſay about the conſciouſneſs of exiſtence being the only conceivable idea of a future life—it proves nothing, either for or againſt the reſurrection of a body, or of the ſame body; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what ſubſtance, material or immaterial, this conſciouſneſs is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit perſonal identity to conſiſt in conſciouſneſs, to diſpute with you on this point, and willingly ſubſcribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but conſciouſneſs can unite remote exiſtences into the ſame perſon."

From a caterpillar's paſſing into a torpid ſtate reſembling death, and afterwards appearing a ſplendid butterfly, and from the (ſuppoſed) conſciouſneſs of exiſtence which the animal had in theſe different ſtates, you aſk, Why muſt I believe, that the reſurrection of the ſame body is neceſſary to continue in me the conſciouſneſs of exiſtence hereafter?—I do not diſlike analogical reaſoning, when applied to proper objects, and kept within due bounds:—but where is it ſaid in ſcripture, that the reſurrection of the ſame body is neceſſary to continue in you the conſciouſneſs of exiſtence? Thoſe who admit a conſcious ſtate of the ſoul between death and the reſurrection, will contend, that the ſoul is the ſub-

ſtance

ſtance in which conſciouſneſs is continued without interruption:—thoſe who deny the intermediate ſtate of the ſoul as a ſtate of conſciouſneſs, will contend, that conſciouſneſs is not deſtroyed by death, but ſuſpended by it, as it is ſuſpended during a ſound ſleep, and that it may as eaſily be reſtored after death, as after ſleep, during which the faculties of the ſoul are not extinct but dormant.—Thoſe who think that the ſoul is nothing diſtinct from the compages of the body, not a ſubſtance but a mere quality, will maintain, that the conſciouſneſs appertaining to every individual perſon is not loſt when the body is deſtroyed; that it is known to God; and may, at the general reſurrection, be annexed to any ſyſtem of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently ſhocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuſe in applying vulgar and offenſive pithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I truſt, continue to be holden, in high eſtimation. I know that the ſcar of calumny is ſeldom wholly effaced, it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuſe of holy men and holy things will be remembered, when your arguments againſt them are refuted and forgotten. Moſes you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief aſſaſſin; Aaron, Joſhua, Samuel, David, monſters and impoſtors; the jewiſh kings a parcel of raſcals; Jeremiah and the reſt of the prophets, liars; and Paul a fool; for having written one of the ſublimeſt compoſitions, and on the moſt important ſubject that ever occupied the mind of man —the leſſon in our burial ſervice:—this leſſon you call a doubtful jargon, as deſtitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at the funeral. Men of low condition! preſſed down, as you often are, by calamities

mities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burdens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this leſſon read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend? Was it mere jargon to you, as deſtitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell?—No.—You underſtood from it, that you would not all ſleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the laſt trump; you underſtood from it, that this corruptible muſt put on incorruption, that this mortal muſt put on immortality, and that death would be ſwallowed up in victory; you underſtood from it, that if (notwithſtanding profane attempts to ſubvert your faith) ye continue ſtedfaſt, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labour will not be in vain.

You ſeem fond of diſplaying your ſkill in ſcience and philoſophy; you ſpeak more than once of Euclid; and, in cenſuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apoſtle ſays—one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory—he ought to have ſaid —in diſtance.—All men *ſee* that one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory or brightneſs; but few men *know* that their difference in brightneſs ariſes from their difference in diſtance; and I beg leave to ſay, that even you, philoſopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an aſſumption which you cannot prove—that the ſtars are *equal* in magnitude, and placed at *different* diſtances from the earth;—but you cannot prove that they are not *different* in magnitude, and placed at *equal* diſtances, though none of them may be ſo near to the earth, as to have any ſenſible annual *parallax*. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this ſubject; but it really moves one's indignation, to ſee a ſmattering in philoſophy urged as an argument againſt

againſt the veracity of an apoſtle.—" Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you ſay, affects to be a naturaliſt; and to prove (you might more properly have ſaid illuſtrate) his ſyſtem of reſurrection from the principles of vegetation—" Thou fool," ſays he, " that which thou ſoweſt is not quickened except it die:"—to which one might reply, in his own language, and ſay—" Thou fool, Paul, that which thou ſoweſt is not quickened except it die *not*." It may be ſeen, I think, from this paſſage, who affects to be a naturaliſt, to be acquainted with the microſcopical diſcoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little uſe in the illuſtration of the ſubject of the reſurrection. Paul ſaid—that which thou ſoweſt is not quickened except it die:—every huſbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would underſtand the apoſtle's phraſe in a popular ſenſe, and agree with him that a grain of wheat muſt become *rotten* in the ground before it could ſprout; and that, as God raiſed from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the ſtem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might alſo cauſe a new body to ſpring up from the rotten carcaſe in the grave.—Doctor *Clarke* obſerves, " In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute inſenſible ſeminal principle, which is itſelf the entire future blade and ear, and in due ſeaſon, when all the reſt of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itſelf viſibly to the eye; ſo our preſent mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviæ*, as it were, of ſome hidden and at preſent inſenſible principle, (poſſibly the preſent ſeat of the ſoul,) which at the reſurrection ſhall diſcover itſelf in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for ſuch I eſteem him) in this philoſophical conjecture;

conjecture; but the quotation may ſerve to ſhew you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itſelf viſibly to the eye till all the reſt of the grain is *corrupted;* that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it *dies.*—Though the authority of Jeſus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expreſſion; when he foretels the numerous diſciples which his death would produce—" Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and *die*, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—You perceive from this, that the jews thought the death of the grain was neceſſary to its reproduction:—hence every one may ſee what little reaſon you had to object to the apoſtle's popular illuſtration of the poſſibility of a reſurrection. Had he known as much as any naturaliſt in Europe does, of the progreſs of an animal from one ſtate to another, as from a worm to a butterfly, (which you think applies to the caſe,) I am of opinion he would not have uſed that illuſtration in preference to what he has uſed, which is obvious and ſatisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epiſtles aſcribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference.—So far from being a matter of indifference, I conſider the genuineneſs of St. Paul's epiſtles to be a matter of the greateſt importance; for if the epiſtles, aſcribed to Paul, written by him, (and there is unqueſtionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of ſound reaſoning, to deny that the chriſtian religion is true. The argument is a ſhort one, and obvious to every capacity. It ſtands thus:—St. Paul wrote ſeveral letters to thoſe whom, in different countries, he had converted to the chriſtian faith; in theſe letters he affirms two things;—firſt, that he had wrought miracles in their preſence;—ſecondly, that many of them-

themſelves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt.—The perſons to whom theſe letters were addreſſed muſt, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they muſt have known, whether they had ſeen him work miracles; they muſt have been conſcious, whether they themſelves did or did not poſſeſs any miraculous gifts.—Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being diſcovered to be lies, as ſoon as his letters were read? —Paul could not be guilty of falſehood in theſe two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the chriſtian religion is true. References to theſe two points are frequent in St. Paul's epiſtles: I will mention only a few. In his Epiſtle to the Galatians, he ſays, (chap. iii. 2, 5.) "This only would I learn of you, received ye the ſpirit (gifts of the ſpirit) by the works of the law?—He miniſtereth to you the ſpirit, and worketh miracles among you."—To the Theſſalonians he ſays, (1 Theſſ. ch. i. 5.) "Our goſpel came not unto you in word only, but alſo in power, and in the Holy Ghoſt."—To the Corinthians he thus expreſſes himſelf: (1 Cor. ii. 4.) "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wiſdom, but in the demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power:"—and he adds the reaſon for his working miracles—"That your faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God."—With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which oppoſed the apoſtle, have laid hold of this and many ſimilar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falſehood in them? There is no need to multiply words on ſo clear a point—the genuineneſs of Paul's Epiſtles proves their authenticity, inde-

independently of every other proof; for it is abſurd in the extreme to ſuppoſe him, under circumſtances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true; and if Paul's Epiſtles be both genuine and authentic, the chriſtian religion is true.—Think of this argument.

You cloſe your obſervations in the following manner:—" Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Teſtament) and Teſtament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occaſion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you ſpeak of it in ſuch a ſtyle of ſelf-complacency. The Bible, Sir, has withſtood the learning of *Porphyry*, and the power of *Julian*, to ſay nothing of the manichean *Fauſtus*—it has reſiſted the genius of *Bolingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*, to ſay nothing of a numerous herd of inferior aſſailants; and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adverſaries; you have feathered them with blaſphemy and ridicule; dipped them in your deadlieſt poiſon; aimed them with your utmoſt ſkill; ſhot them againſt the ſhield of faith with your utmoſt vigour; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will ſcarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a ſtroke.

LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the ſubject of animadverſion. It principally conſiſts of unſupported aſſertions, abuſive appellations, illiberal ſarcaſms, *ſtrifes of words, profane babblings, and oppoſitions of ſcience falſely ſo called.* I am hurt at being, in mere juſtice to the ſubject, under the neceſſity of uſing ſuch harſh language; and am ſincerely ſorry that, from what cauſe I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point reſpecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things; for there is a philoſophical ſublimity in ſome of your ideas, when you ſpeak of the Supreme Being, as the creator of the univerſe. That you may not accuſe me of diſreſpect, in paſſing over any part of your work without beſtowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your—concluſion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reaſon; in which you have ſpoken of what you eſteem three frauds—myſtery, miracle, and prophecy.—I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have ſaid on theſe ſubjects; they are ſubjects of great importance, and we, probably, ſhould differ eſſentially in our opinion concerning them; but, I confeſs, I am not ſorry to be excuſed from examining what you have ſaid on theſe points. The ſpecimen of your reaſoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every

every inclination to trouble either my reader, or myſelf, with any obſervations on your former book.

You admit the poſſibility of God's revealing his will to man; yet "the thing ſo revealed," you ſay, "is revelation to the perſon only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation."—This is true; his account is ſimple teſtimony. You add, there is no "poſſible criterion to judge of the truth of what he ſays."—This I poſitively deny; and contend, that a real miracle, performed in atteſtation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that atteſtation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this poſition; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not ſpeak unadviſedly, or as wiſhing to dictate to other men, when I ſay, that I am perſuaded the poſition is true. So thought Moſes, when, in the matter of Korah, he ſaid to the Iſraelites—"If theſe men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not ſent me."—So thought Elijah, when he ſaid—"Lord God of Abraham, Iſaac, and of Iſrael, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Iſrael, and that I am thy ſervant;"—and the people before whom he ſpake, were of the ſame opinion; for, when the fire of the Lord fell, and conſumed the burnt ſacrifice, they ſaid—"The Lord he is the God."—So thought our Saviour, when he ſaid—"The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witneſs of me;"—and, "if I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." What reaſon have we to believe Jeſus ſpeaking in the goſpel, and to diſbelieve Mahomet ſpeaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a divine commiſſion; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as

an impoſture of man. The reaſon is evident; Jeſus eſtabliſhed his pretenſions, not by alledging any ſecret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the preſence of thouſands, and which the moſt bitter and watchful of his enemies could not diſallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all.—Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a relation. If a ſeries of prophets ſhould, through a courſe of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain perſon, whom God would, at a particular, time, ſend into the world for a particular end; and at length a perſon ſhould appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accompliſhed; ſuch a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that perſon ſhould deliver to mankind. Or if a perſon ſhould now ſay, (as many falſe prophets have ſaid, and are daily ſaying,) that he had a commiſſion to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, ſhould predict—that, after his death, he would riſe from the dead on the third day;—the completion of ſuch a prophecy would, I preſume, be a ſufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have ſaid concerning the will of God. Now I tell you, (ſays Jeſus to his diſciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him,) before it come, that when it is come to paſs ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the goſpels our Saviour, with the utmoſt propriety, claims to be received as the meſſenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his perſon, and from the predictions which he himſelf delivered. Hence, inſtead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the chriſtian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an eaſy matter to uſe an indecorous flippancy of language in ſpeaking of the chriſtian religion, and with a ſupercilious negligence

negligence to claſs Chriſt and his apoſtles amongſt the impoſtors who have figured in the world; but it is not, I think, an eaſy matter for any man, of good ſenſe and ſound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of chriſtianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you aſk, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah ſhall anſwer you: it teaches us—"to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;"—juſtice, mercy, and piety, inſtead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Teſtament teaches us? You anſwer your queſtion—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman.—Abſurd and impious aſſertion! No, Sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miſerable ſtuff, this blaſphemous perverſion of ſcripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Teſtament. I will tell you the leſſon which it teaches to infidels as well as believers; it is a leſſon which philoſophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor ſophiſtry diſprove; the leſſon is this—"The dead ſhall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear ſhall live:—all that are in their graves ſhall come forth; they that have done good, unto the reſurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the reſurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the goſpel are ſo well fitted to promote the happineſs of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that bleſſedneſs, of which, in our preſent ſtate, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your diſapprobation. You ſay, however,—"As to the ſcraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly ſcattered in thoſe books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion."—"Whatſoever

ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them."—Is this a ſcrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentered eſſence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are diſtinguiſhed by moraliſts into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it inſtructs you, that this diſtinction is done away? when it bids you "put on bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel againſt any." Theſe, and precepts ſuch as theſe, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederic*, or *Juſtinian*; you cannot find them in our ſtatute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the ſchools of heathen philoſophy; or, if ſome one or two of them ſhould chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the conſciences of mankind by any ſanction. It is in the goſpel, and in the goſpel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to un unbeliever voluntary acts, to a chriſtian they are indiſpenſable duties.—Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another:" the law of chriſtian benevolence is enjoined us by Chriſt himſelf in the moſt ſolemn manner, as the diſtinguiſhing badge of our being his diſciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconſiſtent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not reſenting injuries, and that of loving enemies.—Who but yourſelf ever interpreted literally the proverbial phraſe—"If a man ſmite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other alſo?"—Did Jeſus himſelf turn the other cheek when the officer of the high prieſt ſmote him? It is evident, that a patient acquieſ-

acquieſcence under ſlight perſonal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneneſs to revenge, which inſtigates men to ſavage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean the doing them all the good in our power; "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirſt, give him drink;" and what think you is more likely to preſerve peace, and to promote kind affections amongſt men, than the returning good for evil? Chriſtianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—"it does not offer a premium for a crime,"—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himſelf, who maketh "his ſun to riſe on the evil and on the good."

In the law of Moſes, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.—*Ariſtotle*, in his treatiſe of morals, ſays, that ſome thought retaliation of perſonal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is ſaid to have given it his ſanction; the decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is ſaid to be ſtill the law of ſome countries, even in chriſtendom: but the mild ſpirit of chriſtianity abſolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every reſentful propenſity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the ſcheme of the chriſtian church to hold man in ignorance of the creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights."—I appeal to the plain ſenſe of any honeſt man to judge whether this repreſentation be true in either particular. When he attends the ſervice of the church, does he diſcover any deſign in the miniſter to keep him in ignorance of his creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the leſſons which are read to him, the ſermons

which

which are preached to him, all calculated to impreſs upon his mind a ſtrong conviction of the mercy, juſtice, holineſs, power, and wiſdom of the one adorable God, bleſſed for ever! By theſe means which the chriſtian church hath provided for our inſtruction, I will venture to ſay, that the moſt unlearned congregation of chriſtians in Great Britain have more juſt and ſublime conceptions of the creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a ſtronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holineſs, and temperance, than all the philoſophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your ſcheme ſhould take place, and men ſhould no longer believe their Bible, then would they ſoon become as ignorant of the creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either jews or chriſtians, now is. Then would they ſoon bow down to ſtocks and ſtones, kiſs their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) to *the moon walking in brightneſs, and deny the God that is above;* then would they worſhip Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the tranſcendent flagitiouſneſs of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What deſign has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever.—All wiſe ſtateſmen are perſuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better ſubjects they will become. Subjects, not from neceſſity but choice, are the firmeſt friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and ſocial rights; they underſtand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting deſpotiſm of republican factions;

and

and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the conſtitution of their country. I have no fear that the people ſhould know too much of their rights; my fear is that they ſhould not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not deſire that men ſhould remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both deſires, and requires, that they ſhould not diſturb the public peace, under vain pretences; that they ſhould make themſelves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties alſo of men in civil ſociety. I am far from ridiculing (as ſome have done) the rights of man; I have long ago underſtood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, ſome rights, which no human government can juſtly take from them, without their tacit or expreſs conſent; and ſome alſo, which they themſelves have no power to ſurrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a ſtate either of nature or of ſociety, is a right of property in the fruits of his induſtry, ingenuity, or good fortune.—Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, aſcertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right, where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an inteſtate; and it allows a man, at his death, to diſpoſe of that property, which the law of nature would cauſe to revert into the common ſtock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profeſs myſelf an utter enemy to that ſpurious philoſophy, that democratic inſanity, which would equalize all property, and level all diſtinctions in civil ſociety. Perſonal diſtinctions, ariſing from ſuperior probity, learning, eloquence, ſkill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they

they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would preſently ſink into a fetid ſenſeleſs maſs of corruption.—Power may be uſed for private ends, and in oppoſition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and inſolently ſuſtained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciouſly applied: but as this is neither neceſſarily, nor generally the caſe, I cannot agree with thoſe who, in aſſerting the natural equality of men, ſpurn the inſtituted diſtinctions attending power, rank, and riches.—But I mean not to enter into any diſcuſſion on this ſubject, farther than to ſay, that your crimination of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to expreſs my hope, that no one individual will be ſo far miſled by diſquiſitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper ſentiments of piety, when you ſpeak of the ſtructure of the univerſe. No one, indeed, who conſiders it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the ſupremeſt veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without aſtoniſhment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavouring to eſcape into the pathleſs regions of unbounded ſpace, yet feeling, at its utmoſt diſtance, the attractive influence of the ſun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God arreſting its progreſs, and compelling it, after a lapſe of ages, to reiterate its ancient courſe?—Who can comprehend the diſtance of the ſtars from the earth, and from each other?—It is ſo great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and loſt, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of above ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this inſtant from the

the brighteſt ſtar, reach the earth in leſs than ſix years.—We think this earth a great globe; and we ſee the ſad wickedneſs, which individuals are often guilty of, in ſcraping together a little of its dirt: we view, with ſtill greater aſtoniſhment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary poſſeſſion of a little portion of its ſurface. But how does the whole of this globe ſink, as it were, to nothing, when we conſider that a million of earths will ſcarcely equal the bulk of the ſun; that all the ſtars are ſuns; and that millions of ſuns conſtitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath diſtributed through the immenſity of ſpace?—Syſtems, however, of inſenſible matter, though arranged in exquiſite order, prove only the wiſdom and the power of the great Architect of nature.—As percipient beings, we look for ſomething more—for his goodneſs—and we cannot open our eyes without ſeeing it.

Every portion of the earth, ſea, and air, is full of ſenſitive beings, capable, in their reſpective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus proviſion is made for a ſucceſſive continuation of happineſs. Individuals yield to the law of diſſolution inſeparable from the material ſtructure of their bodies: but no gap is thereby left in exiſtence; their place is occupied by other individuals capable of participating in the goodneſs of the Almighty. Contemplations ſuch as theſe fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why ſhould we ſtop here? why not contemplate the goodneſs of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only-begotten Son Jeſus Chriſt, he hath redeemed the whole human

man race from the eternal death, which the tranſgreſſion of Adam had entailed on all his poſterity.—You believe nothing about the tranſgreſſion of Adam. The hiſtory of Eve, and the ſerpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real hiſtory, or an allegorical repreſentation of death entering into the world through ſin, through diſobedience to the command of God.—Be it ſo.—You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever mean it was introduced: this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge.—The New Teſtament tells us, that, through the merciful diſpenſation of God, Chriſt hath overcome death, and reſtored man to that immortality which Adam had loſt:—this alſo you refuſe to believe.—Why? Becauſe you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption.—Miſerable reaſon! ſtupid objection! What is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of graſs, not for the fall of the leaf of the foreſt—and will you refuſe to eat of the fruits of the earth, becauſe God has not given you wiſdom equal to his own? Will you refuſe to lay hold on immortality, becauſe he has not given you, becauſe he, probably, could not give to ſuch a being as man, a full manifeſtation of the end for which he deſigns him, nor of the means requiſite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehenſion of his infant children, all the views of happineſs which his paternal goodneſs is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, inſtruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God; we are in the very infancy of our exiſtence; juſt ſeparated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be poſſible for the Father of the univerſe

univerſe to explain to us (infants in apprehenſion!) the goodneſs and the wiſdom of his dealings with the ſons of men. What qualities of mind will be neceſſary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what diſcipline in this infancy of exiſtence may be neceſſary for generating theſe qualities, we know not; whether God could or could not, conſiſtently with the general good, have forgiven the tranſgreſſion of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of ſin be not ſo great, ſo oppoſite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilſt it exiſts, that is, whilſt the mind retains a propenſity to it, we know not: ſo that if there ſhould be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reaſon for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be conſidered as but one ſmall member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be ſubject to diſcipline and laws productive of the greateſt poſſible good to the whole ſyſtem, then may we ſtill more reaſonably ſuſpect our capacity to comprehend the wiſdom and goodneſs of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the univerſe.

You are laviſh in your praiſe of deiſm; it is ſo much better than atheiſm, that I mean not to ſay any thing to its diſcredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncauſed cauſe of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yeſterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to morrow? who has no relation to ſpace, not being a part here and a part there, or a whole any where? What think you of an omniſcient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniſcience enables him to know them, what think you of the con-

contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being, who existed through eternity, without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist.—I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a christian.—As a deist, I have little expectation; as a christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion, You, and other men, may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's

God's moral government of the world—from many modes of analogical reaſoning, and from other ſources, ſome of the philoſophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philoſophers may, perhaps, collect a ſtrong probability of a future exiſtence, but (which is quite a diſtinct queſtion) of a future ſtate of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to looſen any of the obligations to virtue; but I muſt confeſs, that I cannot, from the ſame ſources of argumentation, derive any poſitive aſſurance on the ſubject. Think then with what thankfulneſs of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die;" yet "in Chriſt (by the covenant of grace) ſhall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God through Jeſus Chriſt;" I conſider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath conſtituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deiſm," you affirm, "teaches us, without the poſſibility of being miſtaken, all that is neceſſary or proper to be known."—There are three things, which all reaſonable men admit are neceſſary and proper to be known—the being of God—the providence of God—a future ſtate of retribution—Whether theſe three truths are ſo taught us by deiſm, that there is no poſſibility of being miſtaken concerning any of them, let the hiſtory of philoſophy, and of idolatry, and ſuperſtition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the miſtakes into which the greateſt reaſoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with reſpect to every one of theſe points. I will advert, briefly, only to the laſt of them. Notwithſtanding the illuſtrious labours of *Gaſſendi*, *Cudworth*, *Clarke*, *Baxter*, and

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of above two hundred other modern writers on the ſubject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human ſoul is as little underſtood by us, as it was by the philoſophers of Greece or Rome. The oppoſite opinions of *Plato* and of *Epicurus* on this ſubject, have their ſeveral ſupporters amongſt the learned of the preſent age, in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world; and they who have been moſt ſeriouſly occupied in the ſtudy of the queſtion concerning a future ſtate, as deducible from the nature of the human ſoul, are leaſt diſpoſed to give from reaſon a poſitive deciſion of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent, than by the diſcordant ſentiments of learned and good men (for I ſpeak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They ſhew the inſufficiency of human reaſon, in a courſe of above two thouſand years, to unfold the myſteries of human nature, and to furniſh, from the contemplation of it, any aſſurance of the quality of our future condition. If you ſhould ever become perſuaded of this inſufficiency, (and you can ſcarce fail of becoming ſo, if you examine the matter deeply,) you will, if you act rationally, be diſpoſed to inveſtigate, with ſerioufneſs and impartiality, the truth of chriſtianity. You will ſay of the goſpel, as the *Northumbrian* heathens ſaid of *Paulinus*, by whom they were converted to the chriſtian religion—" The more we reflect on the nature of our ſoul, the leſs we know of it. Whilſt it animates our body, we may know ſome of its properties; but when once ſeparated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since, then, the *goſpel* pretends to give us clearer notions of theſe matters, we ought to hear it, and laying aſide

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all paſſion and prejudice, follow that which ſhall appear moſt conformable to right reaſon."

What a bleſſing is it to beings, with ſuch limited capacities as our's confeſſedly are, to have God himſelf for our inſtructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing—not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of ſcience—not the hiſtories of mighty empires deſolating the globe by their contentions—not the ſubtilties of logic, the myſteries of metaphyſics, the ſublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticiſm.—Theſe, and ſubjects ſuch as theſe, properly occupy the learned leiſure of a few; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and muſt ever remain, ignorant of them all; they muſt, of neceſſity, remain in the ſame ſtate with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himſelf into, when he made a reſolution, bordering on barbariſm, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death; and, if we are to live again, we are intereſted in knowing—whether it be poſſible for us to do any thing whilſt we live here, which may render that future life an happy one.—Now, "that thing called chriſtianity," as you ſcoffingly ſpeak—that laſt beſt gift of Almighty God, as I eſteem it, the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, has given us the moſt clear and ſatisfactory information on both theſe points. It tells us, what deiſm never could have told us, that we ſhall certainly be raiſed from the dead—that, whatever be the nature of the ſoul, we ſhall certainly live for ever—and that, whilſt we live here, it is poſſible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlaſting life an happy one.—Theſe are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the beſt; and they ſuggeſt to all ſuch a cogent motive

to

to virtuous action, as deiſm could not furniſh even to *Brutus* himſelf.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciouſneſs of life; and ſome may have hypocritically profeſſed chriſtianity from proſpects of temporal advantage: but, being a ſtranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myſelf. The generality of unbelievers are ſuch, from want of information on the ſubject of religion; having been engaged from their youth in ſtruggling for worldly diſtinction, or perplexed with the inceſſant intricacies of buſineſs, or bewildered in the purſuits of pleaſure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leiſure, to enter into critical diſquiſitions concerning the truth of chriſtianity. Men of this deſcription are ſoon ſtartled by objections which they are not competent to anſwer; and the looſe morality of the age (ſo oppoſite to chriſtian perfection!) co-operating with their want of ſcriptural knowledge, they preſently get rid of their nurſery faith, and are ſeldom ſedulous in the acquiſition of another founded, not on authority, but ſober inveſtigation. Preſuming, however, that many deiſts are as ſincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that ſome are more able, and all as much intereſted as myſelf, to make a rational inquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propenſity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a ſubject ſurpaſſing all others in importance; but they are not, on that account, to be ſpoken of by me with aſperity of language, to be thought of by me as perſons alienated from the mercies of God. The goſpel has been offered to their acceptance; and, from whatever cauſe they reject it, I cannot but eſteem their ſituation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that perſuaſion I have been induced to write this book. I do not

expect

expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honourable activity; but there is a time of life when they ceaſe to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impreſſion on you; but I indulge an hope, that it may not be without its effect on ſome of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed, it threatens to overſpread the land; its root is principally fixed amongſt the great and opulent, but you are endeavouring to extend the malignity of its poiſon through all the claſſes of the community. There is a claſs of men, for whom I have the greateſt reſpect, and whom I am anxious to preſerve from the contamination of your irreligion—the merchants, manufacturers, and tradeſmen of the kingdom. I conſider the influence of the example of this claſs as eſſential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and deſirous of information on all ſubjects. If this little book ſhould chance to fall into their hands after they have read your's, and they ſhould think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully anſwered, I intreat them to attribute the omiſſion to the brevity which I have ſtudied; to my deſire of avoiding learned diſquiſitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing rather than to an impoſſibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I addreſs the ſame requeſt to ſuch of the youth of both ſexes, as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poiſon of infidelity; beſeeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to anſwer, to their ſatisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the riſing generation of this land may be preſerved from that "evil heart of unbelief," which has brought ruin on a neighbouring nation;

that neither a neglected education, nor domeſtic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the faſhion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the concluſion of my *Apology for Chriſtianity*, I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme averſion to public controverſy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my averſion has increaſed with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate: ſuch of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me; nor will this receive any, if it ſhould meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wiſhing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revea'ed religion, which is the foundation of my happineſs in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

Calgarth Park,
January 20, 1796.

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